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# STALIN

## THE AUTHOR

Of the distinguished journalist and commentator on world affairs, the New York *World-Telegram* says: "Eugene Lyons knows his Russia." Editor of *The American Mercury* and author of the best-seller, *Assignment in Utopia*, Eugene Lyons holds a unique place among foreign correspondents. He was the first foreign correspondent to interview Stalin after the latter's rise to power. He is the only one ever to be granted an interview by the Shah of Persia. In his six years in Moscow, he was able to observe as were few outsiders the confused, intricate and fateful workings of the Soviet experiment. He was the first of a now rapidly-growing band to realize the inconsistencies of Stalinism and to reveal how the Revolution had been betrayed by its purported leader. The scope of his knowledge of foreign affairs is broad: after considerable newspaper experience in this country, he went to Italy to watch the growth of Fascism in 1920-21; spent the years 1928 to 1934 in Russia; and in addition reported important events in Germany and the Near East. Now in this country, Eugene Lyons is recognized as one of our most acute interpreters of foreign affairs on the lecture platform, on the radio, and in the magazines.





JOSEPH STALIN

# STALIN

Czar of all the Russias

by

EUGENE LYONS



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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

In this brief biography of Joseph Stalin I have sought to present one of the most significant and influential figures of our time in a simple unacademic treatment. I am aware of the risks of over-simplification involved in such a procedure; after all, Stalin's career is integrated with the larger story of the Russian Revolution and the history of the Communist Party. I have drawn upon my personal studies and impressions during the years I lived and worked in the shadow of Stalin's might. But beyond that I have necessarily relied on the pioneer labors of others in this field. I want to express my indebtedness especially to *Stalin, A Critical Survey of Bolshevism* by Boris Souvarine, and *Stalin* by Isaac Don Levine. I also wish to acknowledge gratefully the helpfulness of Charles Malamuth.

E. L.





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# STALIN



## ASIATIC DESPOT

**A** DARK-VISAGED, POCK-MARKED, slow-moving Asiatic dominates the landscape of world affairs today. His shadow stretches ominously across two continents, and his influence is inescapable on all continents. The clamorous news of a war-torn world makes no sense without reference to this man's power and personality.

Born Yossif Vissarionovich Djughashvili in a peasant cobbler's hovel, in the slums of a fourth-rate Caucasian town, he made his place in history as Joseph Stalin, the absolute ruler of the largest territorial empire in the world. Until nearly twenty he studied for the priesthood. For twenty years thereafter he labored to uproot the existing social order, as one of the denizens of the political underworld of Czarist Russia, despised, ignored and persecuted. Supreme ruler by fifty, he is today, having passed sixty, methodically reaching out for dominion far beyond the frontiers of his own country. He is the most fawned upon, the most hated, the most feared human being alive.

This man, sprung from an offal-heap of feuding races and clashing superstitions, has climbed relentlessly to the highest peak of personal authority in the modern world. Having captured the greatest social revolution in the history of mankind, he remolded it in his own grotesque image. Merely as the career of one human being—warped, handicapped, without exceptional endowments of mind



or spirit—who brutally clawed a path to the mastery of his world, Stalin's life is endlessly fascinating. Moreover, it is profoundly significant, because in his own person Stalin sums up the dominant aspect of the history of our times: *the bankruptcy of idealism and the triumph of amoralism.*

Stalin is unquestionably the most powerful individual in the world today: a vengeful demi-god to part of mankind, an awe-inspiring demon to the rest. His might cannot be measured merely by the size of Russia. Stalin is not merely the despotic head of a vast state. He is also the infallible leader of a strange new faith—a mundane, sacrificial religion without a god and without an ethical system. This dual role of the autocrat of the Kremlin must always be borne in mind, to estimate truly his place in the world today.

He rules the immensity of Russia, with its 180,000,000 inhabitants, its 175 different national and racial groups, its eight million square miles—from the Arctic to the semi-tropics, from the German frontier to the Pacific. He rules it more arbitrarily than any Czar in five centuries of absolutism.

Neither Ivan the Terrible nor Peter the Great, though the trappings of their despotism were more showy, actually exercised as rigid a control over his subjects as Stalin. They had neither Stalin's great army nor his massive and efficient secret police, neither his political party nor his indoctrinated youth. They were content with political dominion. Not so Stalin, who in addition monopolizes economic life through a new industrial-agrarian state feudalism of which he is supreme overlord. Through his control of all channels of information and education, he also rules

the minds of his people. There is no sanctuary for his subjects. They cannot escape his ubiquitous power. They have neither a private conscience nor private property. They have not even individual viewpoints into which they can retreat.

Besides—and this is generally overlooked when comparing the modern despot with his prototype of former epochs—Stalin has at his command the technical instrumentalities for making his will effective instantaneously in the remotest corner of his domain. He has radio and rotary presses, airplanes and telegraph lines, machine guns and armored cars. These products of current science multiply the strength of presentday dictators a thousandfold.

The modern totalitarian regime is in large measure a by-product of our technological age. It rests on the acquiescence of the millions, though that acquiescence is obtained by the subtle coercion of propaganda and the cruder coercion of naked force. In the past, absolute rulers tried to keep their subjects ignorant. Today dictators teach them to read and provide them with radio receivers. What would be the sense of a monopoly of the printed and spoken word if the populace had no means for reading and hearing it? Today's dictators deliberately indoctrinate their people with disinformation that is far more blinding than mere ignorance.

Stalin uses these tools of power to the utmost. The surface forms of his regime are of this age, with enough of "voting" and "parliaments" to fool even astute Western visitors who do not remain too long. The technical paraphernalia of his country are raucously Twentieth Century. There is, indeed, a certain crude exaggeration to these ex-

ternals that gives them a pathological quality—the industrial elephantiasis of biggest factories, biggest electric stations, biggest everything.

But at the core he remains true to the ancient Russian pattern. He remains an Asiatic despot, whose slightest whim outweighs all the decrees of his marionette “commissariats,” “legislatures” and “social institutions.” One must have witnessed Stalin’s absolutism in close-up, as the writer has done for six continuous years, to believe it. The Western mind can scarcely imagine or credit such might.

I recall a nightmare period when terror reigned in 70,000 Russian villages. Even Sidney and Beatrice Webb, apologists for the Kremlin brutalities, have admitted that 1,000,000 peasant families—some 5,000,000 men, women and children—were at that time uprooted and dumped in distant wildernesses and deserts to survive if they could. I saw trainloads of the wretched victims being dragged to their doom in filthy cattle-cars. As an expression of Stalin’s power this wholesale destruction of human life was deeply impressive.

Far more impressive, however, was the ease and abruptness with which Stalin called off the nightmare temporarily. He published a brief letter calling for a halt—and instantly the horror that he had ordered ceased. It is thus that he turns on at will the faucets of death, torture, terror for tens of millions—and thus that he turns them off at will. He disposes of a few million human lives more casually than any herder disposes of his cattle. His simplest word of praise catapults a nobody to glory; his hint of a frown means extinction for those seemingly on the heights of power.

But beyond that, Stalin rules over another empire that cuts across all borders, as the dictator of the Third or Communist International. It is a strange empire—the strangest in history in many ways. In some areas of the world it flourishes above ground and sends its spokesmen into national parliaments. In other areas it lives furtively underground, outlawed and persecuted. But everywhere its citizens bring to Stalin an allegiance transcending loyalties to their own land.

What other past or present ruler had in his hands the reins of political parties in nearly all other countries? What other ruler can order millions of followers under foreign flags to change their minds, or throw out their minds altogether, or perform the most cynical political somersaults without the courtesy of an advance warning? Stalin is as completely the boss of every Communist Party outside Russia as though it were a local Soviet in Odessa or Vladivostok. Behind the public leaders—the Browders and Pollitts and Cachins—is always the Comintern agent, responsible only to the Kremlin. He gives the orders, dispenses the subsidies, snaps the whip. The ostensible local leaders obey or get out of the party.

Thus Stalin is simultaneously an omnipotent Czar over one-sixth of the earth's habitable surface, and the omnipotent director of a fantastic conspiracy in the other five-sixths.

For a long time, even after he was the real master of Russia, the outside world ignored him. He has none of the flash of a Hitler or a Mussolini to attract attention. He "grew" on the world imperceptibly. That has ever been his

method—to gather the strands of authority silently, in the shadows.

Stalin, as we shall see, was underestimated by the Czarist police when he was a professional revolutionist in the old Russia. He was dismally underestimated by his associates in the first years of the revolution, an error for which most of them ultimately paid with their lives. And only in recent years has the world beyond Russia become conscious of him. At this writing, with his Red Armies on the Baltic, with his troops deployed on the edges of Great Britain's Middle Asian Empire, that consciousness has suddenly been intensified to alarm. It took the biggest diplomatic bombshell of this generation—the announcement of the friendship pacts between Stalin and Hitler—to make the world see the obvious.

But the more the world becomes aware of Stalin, the less it understands him. The larger his image grows, the more enigmatic it seems. Somehow Stalin cannot be fitted into any neat category of greatness. He defies classification because he has few of the distinctive marks of genius—neither mental brilliance nor physical prowess; neither inspired thinking nor messianic fervor.

In vain we seek in Stalin's make-up for the divine spark of a Napoleon, a Lenin, or even a Hitler. We discover only the commonplace and banal stuff of a routine politician. More of this ordinary stuff, but no better in quality, so that the difference between Stalin and one of his lowly provincial secretaries seems a difference only in scale. He is bigger, not greater. He is "blown up," and exceptional only in the magnitude of his cruelty and his craftiness. He is a synthesis of Robespierre, Fouché and Bonaparte,

though, being a synthesis, essentially unlike any of them. With Robespierre he shares his fanaticism, with Fouché his flair for intrigue rather than policy, with Bonaparte his absolute power. He has a million henchmen, but not a single friend. Millions grovel before him in awe, none stands before him in erect and free admiration.

When we look confidently into Stalin's character for the fire of genius, we find only the tepid ashes of mediocrity. For all its extraordinary *dénouement*, his career is as dull as that of a miser. In the most calculating fashion, patiently and persistently, he accumulated power as another might have accumulated dollars. The lives of the great often have in them the quality of epic art. An inner creative fire, some principle of inevitable growth and climax, finds expression in the career of a Napoleon, in the career of a Trotsky. Stalin's rise is about as epic and creative as the piling of debris upon debris to make a mountain.

It is because we try to force him into the conventional pattern of other great historic figures that he remains a mystery. And also because we try to measure him—the Asiatic, the Byzantine—with Western yardsticks. For clues to his amazing rise we must look in the mountainous Caucasus which cradled him, and in the history of the flat sprawling Russia that is his stepmotherland. Stalin's counterpart will not be found in the succession of conquerors from Charlemagne to Hitler and Mussolini, but among the half-mad company that counts Genghis Khan and Ivan the Terrible, the Ottoman Sultans and Peter the Great.

For six years I lived in the deepening shadow of Stalin's ruthlessness and watched him build the edifice of his ty-

rannical might. I saw his offhand massacre of innocents in a man-made famine, and sat through many of the fantastic demonstration purge trials. Once I remained in Stalin's presence for two hours, in the first interview he had given to a foreign reporter since his rise to power—and once is a lot for this least accessible of rulers. I have spent days and months with a number of the men around him—most of whom he has since killed off. I have also known people who had come close to the private Stalin, the human being under the fearsome public image.

Year after year, because the man Stalin fascinated me, I have followed carefully his every word and his every political gesture. My purpose in this brief outline of his life, therefore, is neither to glorify nor to vilify him. I want to attempt the more difficult task—to understand him. It is not a moral judgement on Stalin that is called for, but some understanding of the forces that shaped him. There is no more logic in reviling a phenomenon like Stalin than in reviling an earthquake. The problem is to learn something about the volcanic pressures that produced him and the likely effects of the disaster.

That I consider him a disaster I want to put on record at the outset. The Russian Revolution, like all great human events, had in it much that was noble and much that was horrible. Stalin's destiny has been to empty that revolution of its elements of nobility, leaving chiefly the horror.

What is the secret of the rise of "Soso" Djughashvili, the peasant-cobbler's boy, to Joseph Stalin, virtual Czar of All the Russias and highpriest of international Bolshevism? How did this man of essentially blunted intelligence match his shrewdness against scintillating minds like Trotsky's

and Bukharin's, and wrest control from their hands?

To understand that we must know a good deal about the Caucasus where Stalin was born and raised. We must also know a good deal about the nature of Bolshevism. The most important event of the World War took place neither on battlefields nor in conference rooms. It was the Russian Revolution. Unlike any that went before, that revolution which overthrew an ancient dynasty was not merely political. It was at the same time economic, social, spiritual. It left no corner of life intact. Above all, it saw the triumph of a great elemental force that called itself Bolshevism.

The world outside mistook it for "socialism," in the democratic, humanist sense that the idea had acquired in Europe through generations of its preachment. Some of its own leaders mistook it for that sort of socialism—they have since then paid in humiliation and death for their mistake. In truth, Bolshevism under the Western socialist labels was deeply Russian and Asiatic. In its temper it was more a *conspiracy* than a movement. The succession of Stalin, the complete conspirator, to Lenin was perhaps inevitable.

Shortly before his death, as we shall see, Lenin warned his followers against Stalin and urged that they clip his soaring wings. Nevertheless, Stalin inherited Lenin's revolution. It is no accident that the others—especially Trotsky, who seemed the "natural heir"—fell by the way. They had too much of Europe, of the West, in their make-up. The slow, plodding Caucasian Stalin—more dependent on instinct than on logic, hating the world he lived in, pathological in his craving for personal power—was a more



appropriate instrument for conspiratorial Bolshevism. He was the true leader for the new officialdom, risen from the dregs and hungering for authority. He was the true expression of masses itching above all else to avenge an oppressive past.

Bolshevism in turn spawned an ugly brood of fascist offspring elsewhere in the world—adaptations of the idea to local conditions and local resentments. Taken together they represent the explosive stuff in the world today. Charges of its dynamite are imbedded in every nation, in colonial regions, among awakened races. Already it has exploded Europe into a new war quite unlike the one that went before—a war of “ideologies,” new and old faiths, that recalls the prolonged religious conflicts of an earlier era. And the end is not yet. Even when the war is brought to a close, it may mean little more than a truce in the larger struggle that is remolding the world.

The uneasy forebodings of Europe—and Europe in this sense includes America—have found echoes in prophecies of the “decline of the West,” of the victory of Asia over Europe. It needs no prophetic insight to recognize the outlines of a totalitarian bloc stretching from the Rhine to the Japanese Islands, halfway across the world. We can see it crystallizing out, obscurely, though we can only guess at its final form. It asserts itself in the vision of “world revolution” nurtured by Moscow; in the “new order in Asia” for which the Japanese are killing and dying; in the paranoiac insistence on a redivision of the world in Nazi Germany.

This whole process finds its focus in Stalin. Geographically he stands astride both continents. Psychologically he

sums up the reaction against the West—against its middle-class morality, its Judeo-Christian ethics, its sentimental emphasis on individual dignity and freedom. In getting closer to a knowledge of Stalin, we are getting closer to the deepest currents of change in the history of mankind at this juncture.

## II

### THE BOY SOSO

WHEN THE PEASANT-COBBLER Vissarion Djugashvili moved from his parental village of Didi-Lilo to the town of Gori, it was counted a bold step up in the world. His native village, on the southern flank of the main Caucasian mountains, was a miserable hole. Gori, with five thousand inhabitants, many saloons, schools, handsome churches, seemed a metropolis by contrast. Besides, it was not far from the Georgian capital, Tiflis, and Tiflis seemed a glamorous center of civilization to an unlettered mountaineer peasant.

But there was no trace of happiness or peace in the Gori hovel to which Vissarion brought his devout child-wife. To begin with, they were abysmally poor, and the cobbler's addiction to drink made things worse. In the second place, though young Catherine prayed and wept endlessly before the many icons on her walls, her children died, one after the other, in their infancy. Three had thus been carried off in succession, and here was Catherine, nearly twenty—getting on in years as such things were reckoned in Georgia—and childless. Now the fourth was expected about Christmas time, and Catherine prayed harder than ever. If it was a boy, she promised in her heart, she would name him for Saint Joseph (Yossif) and dedicate him to the service of God.

The child was born on December 21, 1879, and was duly christened Joseph, and he lived. We can understand how deeply Catherine Djugashvilli cherished the child. He was born with his left arm partially paralyzed and two toes grown together unnaturally. He was far from good looking, even in a mother's eyes. But physical imperfections only endeared him the more to Catherine. She regarded them as a punishment for her sins, though modern science might be inclined to trace the crippled arm rather to his father's alcoholic sins. Affectionately the boy was nicknamed "Soso," and Soso he was to remain to his few intimate acquaintances even in the years when he ruled an empire from the Moscow Kremlin. At the age of seven he survived an attack of small-pox, a disease of the poor common in those parts, and forever after his face would remain slightly pitted.

Catherine was meek and brow-beaten. She sewed and washed other people's clothes to make up for what Vissarion squandered on drink. The few reminiscences of Stalin's schoolmates leave no doubt that his home was a hell of extreme want, domestic bickerings and brutality. One of these reminiscences tells how his home life "drove from Soso's heart love of God and people and caused him to hate his own father."

In the hour of his great rise to power Stalin was asked by a foreigner how he became a revolutionary. He cited the poverty of his childhood among the causes. But it was not merely physical deprivation that rankled in his memory, we may be sure. Millions of others pass through destitute childhoods without being forever warped. To Stalin poverty was a complex that included the blows of a

drunken father, the tears of a beaten mother, and his humiliation before other children.

Perhaps Catherine sometimes referred to her dream of raising Soso for the priesthood. But Vissarion the cobbler only snarled his disgust—the Djugashvillis for generations, as far back as anyone remembered, had been shoemakers and Soso would be a shoemaker.

Of course, cobbling was not what it used to be in the Didi-Lilo days. Strange new machines were being brought from distant places. A shoe factory was put up near Gori. Vissarion, along with hundreds of other peasant handicraft workers, had his first taste of modern industrialism. The new world of capitalism was overrunning the primitive, semi-feudal world in which Gori was set.

When Soso was eleven, his father died. There was no void in the boy's heart. He had been his mother's son from the beginning, hating Vissarion's mistreatment of Catherine, hating the poverty which made bread a luxury in their home. Now that the future of Soso was entirely on her shoulders, there were no more obstacles on his path to the theological seminary and thence, with God's help, to a career in the Church.

Soon after the small-pox attack that nearly carried him off, Catherine had put the boy into a parochial school, with the help of the neighborhood priest. Now that Vissarion was gone, she succeeded in enrolling him in a primary ecclesiastical school. Georgian was the language in Soso's home. In school he perspired over the strange foreign tongue, Russian, and to this day it remains a foreign tongue to him, strongly and unpleasantly flavored with a Caucasian accent. His mother now worked harder than ever,

to support the two of them and to keep her beloved Soso—the unhandsome, sulking, handicapped boy of her heart—from being apprenticed to a cobbler or sent into the shoe factory. Three years later, when he was fourteen, she managed to obtain a scholarship for him and he entered the seminary at Tiflis.

To the end of her days Stalin's mother was to consider the diversion of his career in other directions the great tragedy of her life. (She died in 1937, at 78.) Even his accession to power, and the strange awe in which her Tiflis neighbors regarded her in her old age, did not reconcile her to the disappointment. Were she not so literal, she would have realized that her ambition had been amazingly fulfilled: that her Soso had become the highpriest of a new religion. For some thirty years, until after the great Revolution, Catherine Djugashvilli was to continue sewing far into the night to sustain herself. Having selected the dangerous and unprofitable road of revolutionary work, her son was to be no help to her.

Let us look at the boy Djugashvilli who would grow one day into the all-powerful Stalin, but was now only a slim, sallow, thin-featured lad about to start his life's adventure. The few pictures that have survived out of his early period show him as distinctly unprepossessing. The nose is long and bony, the forehead exceptionally low. His looks, indeed, have improved with age. Neither his mother nor anyone else who knew him then has vouchsafed detailed information about Stalin's childhood. Memoirs written in recent years by his sycophants have little value, since they see him through the prism of his Kremlin power. Indeed, remembering the "proper" things, in line with the official

legend about him, was to become compulsory.

But the few scattered indications gathered by his biographers outside Russia, and therefore free to tell the truth, show nothing that is remarkable. They suggest the ugly duckling, in whom a sense of inferiority is deepened by unsavory home surroundings and by the higher social status of his schoolmates; the uncouth cobbler's son among the sons of priests and storekeepers in the school was scarcely comfortable or happy. Like the other Georgian and Armenian boys of Gori, like the Moslem Tartar children among his street acquaintances, he had been born into a slothful society shot through with hatreds. It was a society stuck neck-deep in an unhappy past and a drab present.

Looking back across forty years, his mother was to say of Soso—to H. R. Knickerbocker, a reporter come all the way from America to Tiflis to talk to her:

"Soso was always a good boy. Yes, he was always a good boy. I never had to punish him. He studied hard, was always reading or talking and trying to find out everything. . . . Soso was my only son. Of course I treasured him. Above everything in the world. . . . His father, Vissarion, —well, his father said he would make a good cobbler out of Soso. But his father died when Soso was eleven years old. And then—and then, you see, I didn't want him to be a cobbler. I didn't want him to be anything but a priest."

Perhaps he was as "good" a boy as she said. A mother's testimony about her only son, offered to a stranger after the son had become a new sort of Czar, must be accepted with reservations. The testimony of schoolmates, scanty and also subject to doubt, is not entirely so flattering. We gather

that he may have been far from the "good boy" of a mother's fond imagination. They even suggest, at points, that he was not too kind to his doting mother.

The local civilization into which boys of Soso's age were born had not changed in essence for centuries. But in the years of their childhood, a miracle transpired. The outside world suddenly began to bang on their doors. Oil-wells in Baku, on the Caspian Sea. Great factories (at least they seemed great to a peasant country) in Tiflis. Wonderful machine-made goods even in Gori. Tidings of this belated industrial revolution reached the little town with the effulgence of far-off things around them.

In his own home the future Stalin, destined to act ruthlessly in the name of the "proletariat," saw a peasant homemaker turned suddenly into a "proletarian," when his father abandoned his own bench and tools for a factory bench and the life of a factory "hand."

With the innovations of the new mechanical age came also new ideas. Curious, proscribed but thrilling words like "socialism" and "democracy" began to seep through from far-off. Legends of racial heroes and vague dreams of racial liberation became tangled into new theories of escape from poverty. But Soso was not to feel the full impact of these new ideas until he was transferred to Tiflis and plunged into the heady student life. Only echoes reached him in Gori. But everything in his boyhood had prepared him for the new revolutionary ferment that waited in the Georgian capital. His soul was thoroughly plowed up to receive the seed.

Consider how many torturing resentments young Soso had been born into and acquired. He was in the lowest



stratum of a conquered and despised race. As soon as they were old enough to know anything, boys in Transcaucasia knew that they hated the Russian gendarmes, soldiers and gold-braided officers. These Russians personified oppression. For nearly a century the Czars had tried to Russianize the races which swarmed and jostled one another in that part of the empire—without the slightest success. Stubbornly the Georgians, Tartars, Armenians, Kurds, Jews, a dozen other races held on to their own languages and their ancient ways.

In the books they read and the stories they heard from their elders they were taught the glories of their Georgian, Armenian or Tartar forebears, as the case might be, and came to look upon the Russian masters not merely as tyrants but as barbarians. Young Soso, for instance, learned quickly to detest the Russians. He knew that Georgian culture was older and greater than Russian, and shared his mother's pride in the fact that Georgia had been Christian during centuries when the barbarian Slavs up north were still pagans.

And there were other hates. You played with little Armenians and even with Mohammedan infidels, but you carried with you the certainty that Georgians were, of course, superior people. Racial antagonisms sharpened by thousands of years of struggle sometimes broke through in bloodshed. Always they hovered close to the surface. The Czar's agents stirred up these animosities deliberately, sometimes provoking violence, in order to rule the minorities more easily.

Even within each group there were family feuds and clannish vendettas, handed down from generation to gen-

eration. A passion for revenge had a special place among the virtues inculcated in the young. Those boys of whom Soso was one were raised in an atmosphere of fierce resentments, and they cultivated a special inner pride—the secret pride of persecuted peoples—to sustain them. To this must be added the boy's private hatreds against the cheerlessness and misery in his home, against the ignorance and savagery of his father, against the crippled arm and the fact that he did not shine in school. His mind was no more than average, so that to excel he must make up the margin with hard work. His official hosanna-singers later would make a virtue of his uncouthness of mind. They would describe it as "simplicity" and credit him with a disdain for the polished and sonorous phrase. In truth, he was incapable of the polish and sneered at the rhetoric of others because he had not the slightest gift for such things himself.

It is in these frustrations and hatreds of the formative years that we have learned nowadays to seek for the sources of a man's mature personality. Here we may find the reasons for the later Stalin's extraordinary thirst for authority over his fellows. It is at bottom a thirst for revenge against a hard and embittered childhood—for balancing accounts with life. It is inextricably mixed, too, with the suppressed and festering passion for revenge against the invaders and persecutors—the Russian barbarians who lorded it over their Georgian betters.

In Tiflis these manifold resentments, conscious or unsuspected, were to be translated into revolutionary slogans.

### III

## THE CAUCASIAN HERITAGE

STALIN'S FATHER was pure Georgian, as far as anyone can tell. But purity of race is at best a relative term in the Caucasus, where about forty languages are spoken within an area smaller than Texas. There are few Georgians without Persian, Armenian, Kurd, Mongol or Slav admixtures in their blood.

But Catherine Djugashvilli, his mother, is apparently of the Ossete race. These distinctions mean nothing to an outsider. But they carry implications of character to those familiar with that fantastic neck of land between the Black and Caspian Seas, joining—or is it separating?—Europe and Asia. For instance, Boris Souvarine, an able historian of Russian affairs, has this to say of Stalin's racial heritage:

"If we are to accept literally the descriptions of the Georgians as friendly, frank, carefree, straightforward, sociable and peaceable, then it must be supposed that Stalin has a strong infusion of Turki blood, through Kurd or Tartar ancestry. Old socialist militants in the Caucasus assure us that Catherine Djugashvilli is an Osse (*Ossetinka*) and attach great importance to this detail: not only are the Ossetes less subtle and more crude than the Georgians, but Russia has always recruited among them a strong proportion of gendarmes and of convict-guards."

The child of this *Ossetinka*, in any event, was to become

the supreme convict-guard over all of Russia. Perhaps there is a certain historical retribution in the tale. At the end of the eighteenth century, Russia finally conquered *Gruzia*, or Georgia as it is called in English. In the twentieth century one of Georgia's sons was in turn to conquer Russia, and reign supreme behind the crenelated walls of Muscovy's Kremlin. For generations Russia sought in vain to put its mark on the Caucasus. In a single generation the Caucasian Stalin would imprint his character indelibly upon Russia.

Nowhere on the face of the globe is there an area in which so many different peoples, cultures and stages of human development exist side by side—influencing each other, to be sure, but never quite merging. The Caucasus is not a melting pot, but a pot in which the ingredients seethe and hiss without ever fusing. Both in time and space, the region has been a crossroads of history.

"Mount of Languages" was the name given to the area by the ancient Arabs. Herodotus and Strabo wrote of the fantastic mixture of races and tongues there. For the Greeks it was the site of mythological Colchis, home of the Golden Fleece. The ancient Jews regarded one of the Caucasian peaks, Mount Ararat, as the place where Noah's Ark came to rest when the flood waters receded. To this day no one is sure whether geographically it belongs to Europe or to Asia, and only the word "Eurasia" can compass it.

The Caucasus is a wild precipitous country, with sheer drops of thousands of feet from its mountain sides, and peaks as high as 18,000 feet towering above skimpy valleys. The races which flowed through its mountain passes for millennia each left a deposit, and those that remained took

the wildness of the land, its dizzy heights and depths, into their souls. Some were caught in the hollows of the mountains and cut off from all outside influence, so that even in recent years unknown tribes, with civilizations conserved intact for a thousand or more years, have been discovered.

To the ancient Greeks, the Caucasus was Iberia and therefore the cradle of the white race. But its mountains, a challenging wall between continents, have been scaled from both sides. Arabs, Persians and Turks overflowed it again and again. It was conquered by the Greeks under Alexander the Great, by the Mongols under Genghis Khan and his crippled descendant, Tamerlane. It was overrun by Vikings from the North, and much later by the Crusaders from Central and Western Europe.

The Georgians, in the valley of the River Kura (Cyrus), and in the mountain fastnesses around it, have a history in which there are only gradations of calamity. For at least two thousand years, buffeted by tidal waves of alien peoples—really independent only for brief periods—they retained their identity. The struggle made them tough, crafty, patient. Their national male costume still includes a dagger and conspicuous pockets for cartridges.

The Georgians took a little of everything that touched them into their make-up, but they kept their language and their basic racial characteristics. Nearly always they have been under the heel of conquerors, so that the respites of independence—such as the reign of King David and Queen Tamara in the twelfth century—are invested with special grandeur in their imagination. Their capital, Tiflis, has been destroyed and rebuilt at least once in every century. Only between 1801 and 1914 did Georgia enjoy approxi-

mate peace, and that the peace of submission to the despised Russians.

Stalin is of these people, and the mark of their history is deeply ingrained in his whole personality.

To Russians the Caucasian character is always fascinating. It is often the subject of their literature. I have heard it discussed a thousand times. Its surface qualities are sufficiently attractive—there is something almost Latin in Caucasian friendliness and hospitality, in their love of wine, song and unrestrained dancing. But under this surface are awe-inspiring depths. The harshness of their struggle for existence, both against the mountainous country and continuous invasions, has made them hard at the core, suspicious of their friends and cruel to their enemies.

Brigandage has flourished in the Caucasus always. Partly it was the product of the pervasive misery of a land in which even the "princes" or land-owners were wretchedly poor. Partly it was the product of a violent history. Even where it was plain highway robbery, this brigandage usually draped itself in Robin Hood romantics, plying the ancient trade under the banners of national liberation. Gori was in the very heart of the romantic region of brigand tradition. Here both legendary and current cutthroats became as a matter of course the shining heroes of a boy's imagination.

They were brave heroes, and gory. Another thing they all had in common: a partiality for clever stratagem. They considered it not only right but a special credit to lure the enemy by trickery—to devise a devilish ruse that piled insult on destruction. A Caucasian proverb has it that "a rope is good when long, a speech when short." Caution,

secretiveness, taciturnity are the marks of the *abrek* or mountain chief, half brigand, half warrior, who is honored above all other men. The blood feud is still the law of the land.

There are those who see in Stalin an *abrek* who has expanded his sway beyond his native mountains. That he did not do this extravagantly on horseback, but craftily by intrigue, is definitely in the tradition of the *abrek*. Two stories, one ancient, the other modern, may help convey the feeling for the Caucasus, essential to an understanding of Stalin.

In the Greek myths and in the Euripides tragedy, *Medea*, it is to the Caucasus (Colchis) that Jason sails in search of the Golden Fleece. The Georgian princess Medea helps him—by murdering her brother. Later, in a fit of jealousy, she avenges Jason's inconstancy by killing her own children. Thus three thousand years ago the Greeks went to Georgia for a character incarnating perfidy, jealousy, vindictiveness.

Then there is the story of Shamil, the Caucasian leader in a war of mountain tribes against Russian invaders. It is told in Count Leo Tolstoy's *Hadji-Murad*. Hadji-Murad is Shamil's best general, but there is a blood feud between them, so that he finally flees for his life and surrenders to the Russians. There he tells how Shamil once lured a local prince to his camp, and murdered him. Having accomplished this vengeance, Shamil ordered the murder of the prince's mother and children. When asked the reason for this additional brutality, Hadji-Murad explains for Shamil.

"Don't you understand?" he says. "Once you have

jumped over with your forelegs, jump over with your hindlegs as well. . . . Once you begin killing a clan, kill them all. Leave no future avenger."

The philosophy of Hadji-Murad is the philosophy of the Caucasus. Its inhabitants do not need to learn it, they imbibe it with their mother's milk. We shall have occasion to think back to it when we see, in later years, how Stalin's G.P.U. never "liquidates" an enemy without liquidating his whole family.

There is a Caucasian story which I heard over and over again in Russia. There is not much point to the story. It merely tells how a Georgian stood on a certain corner for ten years, day after day, waiting. Finally what he waited for came to pass. His favorite enemy walked that way and he drove a dagger into his back. And when I heard it I thought of Medea, of Hadji-Murad, and of a well-known saying of Stalin's. He was asked what he thought the best thing in life, and this was his answer:

"To choose one's victim, to prepare one's plans minutely, to slake an implacable vengeance, and then to go to bed—there is nothing sweeter in the world."

More than in the outward facts of his life, his Caucasian heritage helps to explain Stalin to the rest of us. Physical courage may be taken for granted, but it is tempered with a deeply-rooted caution. Why risk death when some other way can be found to achieve the same results? Throughout his career Stalin has preferred indirection, intrigue, to a direct frontal attack.

The recurrent theme in Georgian folklore is vengeance. It is also the red thread that runs through the life story of Stalin. He needed power to avenge himself, and he



gathered more power by the very process of avenging himself. What he ultimately did to the Russian Revolution may, in fact, be seen as a revenge against the movement in which he served so long as a lowly, unappreciated "hall sweeper." The expression is his own, and it is significant clue to the anger that smoldered in his vitals against that humble role.

But above all other attributes we must underscore Stalin's inexhaustible patience. Because the outside world became aware of him suddenly, it has the impression that he burst upon the Russian scene tempestuously, swept all before him, and took charge. The facts are the very reverse. He has nothing tempestuous in his nature. He moved so cautiously, built his political machine so slowly, that even those close to him failed to understand what he was doing.

Through the whole of his pre-1917 revolutionary career, for nearly twenty years, he kept himself in the background, biding his time. Even after the revolution, as we shall see, he deliberately kept to the shadows. Thereafter, with almost superhuman restraint, he strengthened his position move by move, never at one blow, playing off the ambitions of one colleague against the weakness of the other. There was distinctly a slow-motion quality about his career.

He waited until 1937 and 1938, half a lifetime, before he finally, in the blood purges of those years, pounced on some of his most hated enemies. Indeed, not until 1939 did he venture to step bodily into the limelight of world affairs. Few observers realized that Stalin was making a melodramatic innovation when he took part personally and

at length in the final negotiations with Joachim von Ribbentrop which resulted in the Soviet-Nazi pact in August 1939, and when he took direct part in the negotiations with various Baltic statesmen whom he had summoned to Moscow. Only once before, in negotiating with Laval in 1935, had he dealt with foreign plenipotentiaries directly.

## IV

### EDUCATION FOR PRIESTHOOD

THE FIVE YEARS which the future Stalin spent in the Tiflis Greek Orthodox seminary did not make him a priest. They made him a revolutionist. There is nothing exceptional in this. The rebellion at the heart of the Czarist empire had long been breaking through the surface in the higher schools, including the seminaries.

Several times in the years before Stalin entered the place, the Tiflis seminary had been the scene of student riots. Once, seven years before Soso's arrival, the rector had been killed by a student, and the act had been gleefully condoned by the other students. The atmosphere of the school, in its official phase, was medieval and oppressive. A prison-like discipline was imposed on the seminarists. Stalin himself recalled in later life:

"We were subjected to the most humiliating regime and the most despotic methods there. Spying was rife in this establishment. At nine o'clock the bell called us to breakfast. We went into the refectory, and when we returned we discovered that, while we were at our table, all our drawers had been searched and turned upside down."

Their letters were read, their lives outside the school spied on. Despite this—perhaps because of this—socialist

pamphlets, anarchist tracts, atheistic dissertations and political manifestoes circulated among the students. Young Soso found revolutionary circles flourishing in the school, the more alluring because they were prohibited and dangerous. There were secret circles or clubs dedicated to the various nationalist causes, to the Populist or anti-monarchist movement then in vogue, and there was also a small Marxist or socialist circle. An education nowhere in the official curriculum was displacing the supposed function of the institution. And the same thing was happening in every higher school in the empire of Czar Nicholas the Last.

The various groups were not sharply divided. All the burgeoning ambitions and yearnings and discontents tended to run together. Hatred of the monarchy was mixed with romantic dreams of Georgian liberation. And the new socialist ideas, which had begun to percolate through from Europe, colored the intellectual mixture.

Modern capitalism had come to the Caucasus suddenly, overwhelmingly, and in its ugliest guise. Peasants by the tens of thousand were being transformed into proletarians, factory workers, herded into barracks and worked to the bone on starvation wages. The dismal industrial revolution which had unfolded in Western Europe rather slowly, permitting psychological adjustment, was inflicted on this outlying region—and for that matter on all of Russia—at one blow, so to speak. There was no period of adaptation to urban life and locked-in labor. That was one reason why the backward brand-new Russian proletariat became more revolutionary—at least, more insurrectionary.

Foreign capital was poured into the Caucasus, from England, Belgium, France, Germany. The absentee owners used the natives on a colonial basis, much as they were using the natives of China and Africa. The Czarist government and Russian overseers policed the system of heartless exploitation, suppressed strikes in blood, and squelched agitations.

The students sought out the workers. Clandestine socialist circles met in the hills, or behind shuttered windows in the smelly slums of the city. The Czarist system of exiling undesirables to more remote sections of the empire, including the Caucasus, had the incidental result of bringing the proscribed ideas into those sections. The students met Russian exiles who had tasted European ideas. The vaguely glamorous dream of saving Georgia from Russia, which boys like Soso Djughashvili brought with them from their homes, was transformed into elaborate plans for a glorious revolution that would end not only Czarism but capitalism.

When Stalin, enthroned in the Kremlin, was asked about his conversion to socialism, he answered:

"I became a Marxist thanks, so to speak, to my social position—my father was a worker in a shoe-factory and my mother was also a working woman—but also because I could hear the murmurs of revolt among the people who lived at the social level of my parents; finally on account of the rigorous intolerance and jesuitical discipline so cruelly crushing me in the orthodox seminary where I passed some years."

This is too pat—a retrospective formula. He threw himself into the underground life of the seminary rebels be-

cause in its excitement he found some compensation for the drab, half-starved life he led. It provided an outlet for the fierce envies and discontents in his heart—and an arena for his pressing ambitions. Hate and envy of the mighty, not compassion for the humble and suffering, moved him. Fellow-students have described him as shabby, disheveled, always penniless. One of them recalls that Soso never received spending money or packages from his home like the other boys. He took out his resentments on the world around him. He would destroy the system and plant himself triumphantly upon its ruins. . . .

It was while still in school that Stalin adopted his first of many pseudonyms—Koba. It was the name of the hero in a popular Caucasian romance, and its very choice, like the later choice of Stalin (“steel-like”), gives a clue to the young man’s day dreams. Obviously he conceived of himself as an unyielding impregnable conqueror. Koba is the name under which his earliest associates in the revolutionary movement knew him. In their memories of the period, a few of which have been published, the Koba who emerges is pretty far from the romantic leader of his own vision. They do not cast doubts on his earnestness or valor. But they reveal him as moving in an element of anger and trouble, always suspecting the intentions of others and being suspected in turn.

The seminary period blended naturally into his later conspiratorial existence. The need to conceal their revolutionary work from their teachers, and from unreliable fellow-students, taught these boys the arts of dissimulation. It was the lesson that they learned best. Stalin cer-

tainly forgot nothing of those methods of spying, censorship, secret searchings which were used against him by the school authorities.

The circumstances under which Stalin, in 1898, left the school are not yet clear. The official Soviet version has it that he was expelled for revolutionary work. His mother has denied this vehemently, claiming that she withdrew him because of his health. Both these explanations are doubtless doctored after the fact. Probably the truth is that the school suggested his withdrawal because he was not measuring up to requirements in scholarship or piety. With his major energies more and more diverted into the channels of political organization and agitation, it is not strange that he should fail in studies and in religious exercises.

The seminary left its ineradicable marks on Stalin. Though he rejected it for himself, he learned the great lesson of hierarchy and discipline—the marks of the Orthodox Church under Czarism—and was to impose it on others in the future. Obedience came before faith, the spirit was smothered in the forms. Under temporal domination (the Czar was also head of the church), rites, ceremonies, elaborate superstitions had superseded the truly religious sentiments. Even as the individual was considered by absolutism as a creature of the state, so the faithful were treated as the property of the Church. It is not strange that, when the test of the revolutionary years came, the ordinary Russians did not defend their religion with one-tenth the vigor that they defended their cows and plows.

Stalin would, in his time of glory, be less concerned

with converting opponents than with obtaining their submission and public confessions of heresy. He would substitute a catechism for thought. The idea that the end justifies the means was in the spirit of the romantic brigandage of the Caucasian mountains; it was fixed in his mind forever by the unwholesome ways of the mismanaged seminary in Tiflis. More than any other individual in the story of Bolshevism, Stalin was to become responsible for turning a living movement into a rigid "faith," with infallible leaders and sacred texts. It was he who conceived the notion of embalming the body of Lenin, turning it into a "sacred relic," and his tomb into a Bolshevik "shrine." The externals of religion, the methods of hierarchy, and the idea of infallibility Stalin derived from his years in the seminary.

Those years have also left startling traces in his style of speaking and writing. When Stalin grows rhetorical, he unconsciously slips into "Church Slavonic" cadences. On the eve of Lenin's funeral, in January, 1924, Stalin spoke to a Congress of the Soviets. The speech has the authentic flavor of priesthood about it. He addressed the dead leader in the familiar "Thou," as though addressing divinity, and cast the whole thing in the form of a church litany:

"In leaving us, Comrade Lenin commanded us to hold high and to keep pure the great name of Member of the party. We swear to Thee, Comrade Lenin, to honor Thy command.

"In leaving us, Comrade Lenin ordered us to conserve the unity of our party as the apple of our eye. We swear to Thee, Comrade Lenin, to honor Thy command.



"In leaving us, Comrade Lenin ordered us to maintain and strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat. We swear to Thee, Comrade Lenin, to exert our full strength to honor Thy command."

On and on in this liturgical style. In December, 1929, when Stalin reached the age of fifty, his birthday was made the occasion for a colossal display of Stalin-worship. Millions of words in his praise inundated the land. Stalin deigned to reply in one paragraph, and it was remarkable for its Biblical flavor. It spoke of "the great party of the working class which gave me birth and raised me in its own image," and pledged to give "all my strength, all my abilities, and, if necessary, all my blood, drop by drop."

Soso Djugashvili, now Koba to his comrades of the cause, took over the forms of Church Slavonic, but none of the spirit of religion. Similarly he took over the forms, the slogans, the patter of European socialism without ever grasping the humanist spirit that was behind it. While still at the seminary he learned some Marx and Engels and other West European economists and reformers—always at second hand, in propaganda pamphlets. He was never to become a genuine student of their philosophy and their economics. Though he would be drawn into theoretical arguments, his interest would be to win, by fair arguments or foul, rather than to get any nearer truth. Victory for his faction, for himself, rather than the triumph of an idea would ever move him to exertion.

One episode in relation to Stalin's withdrawal from the seminary deserves mention. Seemingly minor in itself, it grows more significant in the context of his whole

life. Soon after he left, several of his closest associates in the school's underground activity were expelled by the seminary administration. The charge was openly made that Soso had denounced them to the rector. No real denial was offered. Soso's defenders only explained that he considered their expulsion from the school necessary to turn them into useful active revolutionaries outside. The end justifies the means.

Perhaps. But the ugly word "denunciation" now pinned on Stalin for the first time was to be hurled at him again and again through the years. The charge was to reach a gory climax in the 1930's, when "denunciation," followed by purges and executions, became the routine of political existence in Stalin's land.

Being already deep in workmen's agitations, Stalin continued in the political underworld of Tiflis after abandoning school. He was nineteen, and therefore a full-grown man in the reckoning of that place and those days. From Tiflis he would extend his activity to other parts of the Caucasus, especially to the most industrialized city, Baku, and then to the larger theater of Russia as a whole. Conspiracy became his profession. He worked hard and dared much, but never in his life was he to do a stroke of what other men call work. He lived for and on the revolution. Under the respectable surface was a nether world—the exciting world where a new Russia was being forged by idealists and ambitious schemers, by honest revolutionaries and political charlatans. His instinct for power took Stalin there as unerringly as another man's instinct for profit might take him into some field of business.

The year 1898 may therefore be taken as the beginning of the career which gave the present-day Stalin to modern history. The point in time has additional meaning because it was the year in which nine men, meeting secretly in Minsk, formed the Social Democratic Party, one wing of which, the Bolsheviki, would take over all power in Russia nineteen years later.

In that year another revolutionist, Leon Trotsky—born in the same year as Stalin, but much farther advanced on the revolutionary road—was already serving a prison term. Both of them belonged to oppressed races, Stalin the Georgian and Trotsky the Jew, and therefore harbored deeper grievances than purely Russian rebels. But in that year the man whom both of them were destined to recognize as their master, a Russian of the Russians, nine years their senior, was already in Siberian exile, writing political tracts that would become the basis of the Bolshevik faith. His name was Vladimir Ilyich Ulianov, known to history as Lenin.

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## V

### THE YOUNG REVOLUTIONIST

TO CATHERINE DJUGASHVILLI the termination of her son's schooling was a tragedy. It must have seemed to her that the long years of sacrifice entailed in his preparation for the priesthood had been cruelly wasted. But to Soso himself it meant a release. Now he could devote all his time to the movement.

After he attained supreme power, Stalin's biography was completely and industriously revised by eager sycophants currying favor with The Boss. The most insignificant revolutionary incident, strike agitation or riot in which he had a part was promoted to a major battle in the class war of Czarist Russia. Entire chapters were written in, other chapters discreetly blurred in the record. It did not require an explicit command on Stalin's part to set this machinery of hindsight in motion. Official historians, memoir writers, poets and painters who ignored his existence until the middle 'twenties, thereafter conveniently remembered that the whole weight of the Russian revolutionary preparation had been on Stalin's shoulders.

The legend that Stalin was Lenin's principal lieutenant within Russia is by this time obligatory knowledge for all Soviet citizens and foreign hangers-on. But it remains a ludicrous exaggeration. Stalin has not claimed it for

himself; he has merely allowed others to claim it for him. On occasion, indeed, he has disclaimed it with demagogic mock humility. Speaking in Tiflis, the scene of his first active underground work, he said, in 1926:

"I must, in all conscience, tell you, comrades, that I have not deserved half the eulogy that various delegates here have given me."

He did not deserve one-tenth the eulogy, of course. In the nineteen years between 1898 and the triumphant Revolution, Stalin was one among many. Not until 1912 did he abandon the limited provincial sphere in the Caucasus for a national role within his party. Even then it remained essentially a secondary role. And in the Caucasus he was by no means the kingpin, though with every passing year he loomed a little bigger. The simple truth is that the records of the time, as distinct from those written after the Revolution, show small recognition of Koba's greatness. The revolutionary press of the time, both over and under ground, mentions him from time to time, but he is overshadowed by scores of more prominent names.

In police records of the time, Koba or Soso Djugashvili does show up sometimes, but always obscurely, in longer lists of known enemies of the established order. Only in connection with his own arrests and sentences do the Okhrana (Secret Service) records become more specific, and they treat him casually enough—just another thorn in the side of the autocracy.

The archives of the Moscow Okhrana, as late as 1912, accord him only a few lines. On the occasion of his arrest in Batum, in 1902, the local gendarmerie seem ut-



PROFESSIONAL REVOLUTIONIST  
"Rogues' Gallery" pictures of Stalin, taken by the Czar's police in 1910.



terly unaware of his importance. Their notation chronicles his age as 23, his body as "medium," and adds: "Special features: Second and third toes of left foot attached. Appearance: Ordinary. Hair, dark brown. Beard and mustaches: Brown. Nose straight and long. Face long, swarthy, and pock-marked."

The very mildness of the sentences he drew is an index to the fact that Stalin's activities, however they might impress future hymn-singers, had not yet impressed the police. Five times he was arrested, imprisoned, and then exiled. Four times he escaped—no extraordinary feat under the loose, inefficient system upon which Stalin would one day improve so vastly. These "escapes" were in no sense prison breaks. They amounted roughly to failure to report to the constable in the place of exile, and a change of identity. The fifth time he was released by the collapse of the Romanov dynasty. Only the last of these exiles was to a place so remote that it constituted an official recognition of his important revolutionary position. Before that the terms were relatively light and the places of exile relatively accessible. Not once was he punished by *katorga*, the dread hard labor in irons described by Dostoevsky in his *House of the Dead*.

There are two facets to this picture of Stalin's early obscurity. It does give the lie to present-day magnifications of his role. But it also throws a revealing light on his crafty method of operation. He may not have been the kingpin, but he was somewhat more active in the local cat-and-mouse game between the police and rebels than the authorities suspected. Stalin knew how to camouflage his activities. He knew how to pull strings behind



the scenes. He was expert at setting the machinery of trouble in motion, himself withdrawing with a whole skin. This need not be set down to cowardice. He was merely exercising the caution inherited from Georgia itself. Now, and always thereafter, he tended to put prudence and cunning above theatrical bravado.

His first important assignment was when he was put in charge of a railway workers' secret circle in Tiflis, in 1898, when he was nineteen. This was not as responsible a task as it may sound, and need not be taken as a sign of precocity. Boys of fourteen and fifteen were often in charge of these groups—reading newspapers and propaganda leaflets aloud to them and teaching them their ABC's. Soon he became a familiar figure in many such circles. The slim, dark young man, with his shock of wiry hair, his unkempt manner was accepted by these groups as one of them. He had no fancy airs about him, nothing of the condescending university man going to the people. The very crudeness of Stalin's language, the blunt, coarse manners of the Gori cobbler's son, made him more acceptable to these workers. He was only one step removed from the soil and the cobbler's bench, and talked their own language to these proletarians who only yesterday were peasants.

He was now a member of the Social Democratic Party and subject to its orders. In 1901 he suddenly left Tiflis for Batum. The party history of the region gives no explanation for the change. But a Georgian socialist newspaper years later did offer one. It declared that "from the earliest days of his activity among the workmen, Djugashvili attracted attention by his intrigues against the

principal leader of the Social Democratic organization, S. Djibladze." It goes on to assert that Stalin had been warned to desist but continued to spread slanders. Finally he was brought up on charges and expelled from the organization.

Intrigue. Slanders. These key words in the story of Stalin, it happens, stare out from the record at every stage of his development. Though there is no absolute proof, in this instance and in some other instances, the mere repetition of this *leitmotif* begins to impress a biographer. From the first charges against the man in the seminary to the latest by Leon Trotsky the emphasis remains on intrigue and slander.

Presumably he was reinstated in the party ranks. In Batum he is known to have instigated workmen to a futile attack on the local prison, in which some lives were lost. In the wave of arrests that followed, Stalin too fell into the police net. For some eighteen months he remained in prison, then he was transferred to exile in Irkutsk Province, Siberia, for three years. He remained only a few months. By January 1904, he had slipped back to Tiflis.

There is no need to trace every arrest and escape in detail. It is a repetitious story, and no different in essence from the stories of hundreds of other "professional revolutionists" of the period. Stalin organized clubs, took part in writing agitational leaflets, printing them on secret presses, and distributing them. His chief job was to keep one step ahead of the gendarmes, constantly changing his name, residence and even his looks.

One of his closest associates at this time was his fellow-

Caucasian Abel Yenukidze, destined to be the Secretary of the Soviet *Tzikh* or parliament, one of the few intimates of Stalin in the Kremlin—and to end before a firing squad along with nearly all those intimates. After the revolution, Yenukidze wrote a brochure about the illegal printing establishments in his native province. In sixty pages, Stalin's name appeared only once, in a quite unimportant connection. A later edition, however, published when Stalin ruled the roost, gave him credit for almost single-handed direction of the underground printing activities. Such are the ways of obligatory flattery.

But Stalin did write manifestoes in his faulty Russian and in Georgian. He did organize the distribution of subversive printed matter. The big contest was with the autocracy. But a no less intense contest was carried on inside the revolutionary movement itself. There were many tendencies, factions within each grouping, and factions within factions.

To an outsider the vehement disputes around fine theoretical differences seems the futile flailing of waters. But in the perspective of time these disputes appear extremely important. What was being fought out, although the disputants themselves were scarcely aware of it, was the future Russia—the Russia that would emerge when the revolutionary moles finally ate through the rotted surface of the monarchy and took over the country.

It was in these inner conflicts that Stalin excelled. True, he lacked theoretical subtlety. But he more than made up for it in the vigor and ruthlessness of his attacks. Those who have written of this Caucasian scene disagree on much about Stalin, but they are unanimous in stressing the

brutality of his offensive tactics. Any argument was good enough if it stunned his opponent. Not truth but victory was his aim. And he was never so much himself as when he struck out at some individual. In Tiflis it was against Djibladze that he intrigued, as we have seen. A few years later, in Baku, he conducted a furious campaign of intrigue against S. Shaumyan, a prominent local Bolshevik who became famous after the revolution as leader of the twenty-six Soviet commissars executed in Baku by the British.

When Shaumyan was mysteriously arrested and exiled, in those early Baku days, the belief was widespread that Stalin had denounced him to the police—the ugliest charge that could be brought against any revolutionary. The accusation was repeated in print years later in a Social Democratic paper. Even if it was unfounded, the fact alone that such rumors could arise around Stalin, again and again, would indicate that his reputation for fair dealing was none too high. Such rumors never touched the names of other important Bolsheviks—except those subsequently proved to have been agents of the police, when the revolution made the archives available. These are the circumstances that encouraged some of Stalin's political enemies, in later years, to charge him with having been a government spy—a charge, be it noted, which his bitterest enemy, Trotsky, repudiates. Much of the Czarist police dossier on Stalin has not yet been published and is not likely to be while Stalin is alive and in power. Only its complete examination publicly (assuming the dossier has not been destroyed by its subject) would finally set ambiguous rumor at rest.

Stalin has claimed that in 1903 he received a letter from Lenin. A great deal has been made of this letter in the Soviet literature seeking to link the two men in the popular mind and in history. But the letter does not exist, nor has Stalin produced a copy of the reply—and surely an obscure disciple would have acknowledged a communication from the founder and leader of Bolshevism. In any case, it would be the only indication that Lenin was conscious of Stalin's existence before they met briefly in Tammerfors, Finland, in December 1905. There are no proofs and no reasons in logic for assuming that Lenin at that moment became fully aware of the swarthy, sullen-looking Georgian. Only very slowly in the following years did the leader begin to recognize the humble existence and the practical abilities of Stalin.

The great event of the first decade of the Twentieth Century, in Russia, was the revolution of 1905–1906. In retrospect we know that it was a dress rehearsal for the successful upheaval still to come. Many of the men and most of the ideas of the later revolution were first tested in the laboratory of this abortive uprising. But that revolution came and went without adding an inch to Stalin's stature.

The sufferings entailed by the Russo-Japanese War only accentuated distress that had been growing more and more unendurable with every day. Strikes, suppressed in blood by the police, broke in waves over the country. Desperate peasants set fire to the homes and crops of their masters. Discontent agitated not only the poorer elements in the population, but even the middle classes, and a portion of the nobility. Wealth was being siphoned off by foreign in-

vestors, while economic depression pinched all classes in Russia.

The disastrous course of the war with Japan, shook the prestige of the monarchy. In January 1905, a general strike took place in the capital, St. Petersburg. On the 22nd of that month, a Sunday, Father Georgi Gapon, an Orthodox priest, led 200,000 workmen in a peaceful march on the Winter Palace, residence of Nicholas II. Humbly the crowd knelt in the snow and prayed to God and to the Czar to intercede for them.

Suddenly the crackle of gunfire filled the air. Cossack regiments swooped down on the unarmed people. This was a blind and stupid government's answer to the prayer. Thousands were killed and wounded and the day remained in the Russian annals as "Bloody Sunday." The massacre burned into millions of Russian hearts, thereafter dedicated to retribution. Father Gapon (though he later became a police agent, and may have been one even when he led the innocents to the slaughter) was appalled. Standing in the blood-stained snow, he called down a curse on the Czar and his "serpent offspring."

Bloody Sunday was the spark that touched off the revolution of 1905. All the revolutionary parties claimed credit. All tried to put themselves at the head of the revolt. But in fact, the explosion had been spontaneous. Mass feelings had simply overflowed. Without central direction, without pre-arranged signals, groups of workmen, peasants, soldiers, sailors in widely separated parts of the country shrugged off the old authority.

There were dramatic events in the Caucasus—a general strike in Georgia, the formation of Red Guards, or-

ganized bomb-throwing in Tiflis. But nowhere does Stalin figure in this drama. The first All-Bolshevik Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Russia had been held in May. The delegates from the Caucasus had been the veteran Tskhakaya and the twenty-two year old Leo Kameney; it had occurred to no one to send Koba. For all that his present biographers may do to change the record, Koba was distinctly in the background. In St. Petersburg the first Soviet in Russia's history was born. The twenty-six year old Social Democrat, Leon Trotsky, became its chairman and the idol of the city masses. Others who were to strut the stage of a later and greater revolt made heroic entrances at this "rehearsal." But not Stalin.

The revolution was crushed. A Constitution and an elected legislature, the Duma, were granted by the frightened monarchy. But these concessions were rapidly pressed dry of all real meaning after the autocracy again had the situation under control. A period of the blackest political reaction and police terrorism followed.

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## VI

# BACKGROUND OF BOLSHEVISM

TO UNDERSTAND STALIN we must understand Bolshevism. It was the creed that nurtured him, and eventually was to become identical with him. But understanding this Bolshevism is no easy matter, because the word implies the whole of Russia's fantastic history, that Russian "soul" which baffles and fascinates Westerners.

Though it uses the language of Karl Marx and other Europeans, Bolshevism is profoundly Russian and therefore Asiatic. It imported much from the West, from the bloodier years of the French Revolution, and from apostles of force and desperation like Babeuf, Blanqui, and Weitling. But it twisted all of these into the shape of its own history of half-mad Czars, unnatural ascetics, Black Hundred pogrom-makers and high-minded bomb-throwers.

There is more of Bolshevism in the works of Dostoievsky than in the works of Marx and Engels. Michael Bakunin, the Russian who is regarded as the father of anarchism, gave more to Bolshevism than any of its supposed socialist forerunners. Nihilism and self-righteous terror on one side, pitiless absolutism on the other, in a land still feudalistic in many of its institutions and most of its thinking—these helped to produce Bolshevism.



Officially it was born and christened in the summer of 1903, in London of all places. There, forty-three exiles met in the second congress of that Social Democratic Party founded by nine men in Minsk five years earlier. From the start the Russian party had developed two main tendencies, one relatively moderate and in the tradition of the humanitarian European socialist movement, and the other extreme, impatient, militant. The division, of course, was not as sharp as this implies; there were overlapping tendencies that took years to crystallize out as embattled factions. There were many members who, on the basis of their views, belonged in both groups or neither. Later developments were to prove that the divergence was as much conditioned by temperaments as by theory. The 1903 congress first drew the line with some sharpness, and Lenin from that time forward was the leader of the more militant group. He relished the fact that the others called him "hard" and compared him with the relentless Jacobins who had made the Terror in the French Revolution.

Through thirty-seven sessions, the forty-three émigrés in London argued the tenets of their party faith and program. And the more they talked the clearer it became that the "hards" and the "softs" were worlds apart. The moderates thought in terms of a mass organization, slowly educated for a political revolution. The others, marshaled by Lenin, wanted a small, close-knit, almost military organization, determined to overthrow the whole social order immediately along with Czarism.

Actually the relatively moderate wing may have represented a majority of the rank-and-file adherents; there

being no membership lists, one guess on this much-disputed point is as good as another. But in the final vote on some crucial issues, Lenin's faction won by a narrow margin of the delegates' votes and became the majority or "Bolshevik" group, and the others, the minority or "Menshevik." The names stuck. It was a fateful division. Though they remained in the same organization, the internal war for domination was fierce and in the end fratricidal. Year after year the struggle consumed their main energies.

"Give us an organization of revolutionists and we will turn Russia upside down," Lenin wrote. He had in mind men and women who would dedicate themselves to revolution as a career, not a part-time cause—"professional" revolutionists. "What we need is a military organization!" he said. It must be unquestioning in its obedience to its central authorities and its elite must forego a private life or private views. Though this military body talked glibly of scientific socialism, it had the character of a blind and fanatic faith. Scientific method was far removed from the authoritarian system planned and imposed by Lenin.

As the factions struggled for control in the next years, a few hoped against hope to reconcile them. Young Trotsky was the most scintillating of these. Temperamentally he sided with the Leninists. Like them, he was for attaining socialism in one mad leap, skipping all the tiresome intermediary steps foreseen by the more timid Mensheviks. But his sharp logic acted as a curb on temperament.

The Bolshevik methods, Trotsky warned fourteen years before the revolution, would bring about conditions in which "the organization of the party takes the place of

the Party itself, the Central Committee takes the place of the organization, and finally the dictator takes the place of the Central Committee." He insisted that Lenin's way meant a dictatorship "over" rather than "of" the proletariat, and warned that "the lion head of Marx would be the first to fall under the knife of the guillotine" if Lenin and his kind succeeded.

History in the end showed Trotsky to be more right than he would himself have dreamed. His tragedy is that in the meantime he had forgotten his own warning. The most damning charge that Russia can make against Trotsky is that he stopped being a Trotskyist at the crucial moment.

Others, outside the ranks of the Menshevik enemies of Bolshevism, warned against the danger. For instance, Plekhanov, whom Lenin until then acknowledged as his teacher, said with amazing insight that Bolshevism must lead to "the final end, when everything would revolve around one man, who will, *ex providentia*, unite all power in himself."

Not one of these prophets had heard of the twenty-four year old Djugashvilli, in a Batum prison when the London congress took place. *Yet each in his way predicted unerringly the dictator Stalin.*

A polemic literature exists around the question whether Stalin joined the Bolshevik faction immediately or some time later. It matters little. If Stalin did not associate himself with Lenin immediately, it was only because he did not yet have the feel of the new faction. By his nature he belonged in it, and his enlistment in its ranks was inevitable.

Menshevism was a movement, and it was impregnated with the idealism of European socialism. Bolshevism was basically a conspiracy, with a rigid hierarchy of power, and it dismissed sentimental nonsense about idealism. It was an instrument made to order for a man like Stalin.

Officially, as I said, Bolshevism was born in London. Actually it had been germinating in Russia century after century. Its roots were in Ivan the Terrible when he slaughtered the aristocrats and in effect led a revolution against their ancient power. Peter the Great was in this sense a Bolshevik, forcing European "culture" down the gullet of his barbarous nation. It is no accident that in the hour of Stalin's power Peter should be pushed forward as the greatest of Soviet heroes. Bolshevism can be traced to the great peasant uprisings led by Stenka Razin and by Pugachov, which burned and killed everything in their path in the name of the common people.

Forty years before the official creation of Lenin's faction, a secret society was launched by a certain Zaichnevsky. It proclaimed that Russia "is fated to be the first to bring socialism into life." There is a breath-taking audacity about such a prophecy. In 1862, in a country of serfs and absolutism, where capitalism had not yet been born, we hear this illogical, mystic assurance of Russia's mission! The later pamphlets of Bolshevism were filled with just such zealous mystical assurance.

How would Zaichnevsky's socialism be brought into being? His proclamation shouts: "Pick up your axes! Attack the imperial party without mercy, even as it has no mercy for us. Kill them in the public squares should this vile rabble dare appear there, kill them in their homes, kill

them in the narrow city alleys, kill them on the wide metropolitan streets, kill them in the villages and hamlets!"

After him came Bakunin, who prided himself on being "the apostle of destruction," who considered bandits "instinctive revolutionaries," who exhorted educated people to forget culture and science and merge themselves with the peasantry. For the guidance of his disciples, Bakunin prepared his fabulous *Catechism for a Revolutionary*, a document so strange that a normal Western mind is staggered by it. The catechism enjoined the faithful to cut loose from civilization, its laws, its morals; to torture and be prepared to accept torture. Destruction of existing society must be their one aim, and for its attainment anything from lying to murder must be used. The revolutionist, he said, must learn the secrets of his enemy in order to blackmail him; he must deepen the sufferings of the simple people in order to hasten the day of revolt. Bakunin even urged union with brigands, "the only genuine revolutionaries in Russia."

One of Bakunin's followers, Nechayev, put these injunctions into effect—to a point where even his master was horrified. Nechayev's underground "People's Avenger," a small and desperate group, murdered the hated landlords and officials and ended by murdering each other. Finally Nechayev even turned on Bakunin, and attacked him in the vilest fashion. In our day, as we see Bolshevik leaders accuse one another of horrible crimes, confessing publicly to monstrosities, condemning each other to death, the Nechayev nightmare seems to have come to life again on a gigantic scale.

Such is the heritage taken over, and adapted to its own uses, by Lenin and after him by Stalin. The direct relation with these bloody forebears is not a matter of guess-work. It has been candidly acknowledged again and again by the Leninists themselves. It was a Bolshevik historian, Pokrovsky, who called Zaichnevsky's proclamation "the first Bolshevik document in our history." The Soviets have raised statues to Stenka Razin and Pugachov. Stalin's regime today glorifies the memory of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great. The whole organizational structure of Lenin's party is close to the one sketched by Nechayev in his "People's Avenger" society.

Though all these flaming revolutionaries and avengers presumably sought the liberation of the common people, their hatreds for the privileged upper classes were stronger than their love for the common people. At bottom they despised those whom they would save. It will give them no twinge of conscience at all, once they are in power, to herd these masses into forced-labor battalions and concentration camps, to "liquidate" them by the million. There is no compassion anywhere—only shrill hatred, blood lust, hunger for revenge.

Compare these Russian socialists, stemming from Nechayev and Lenin, with their European counterparts of the same period. Here and there we find a few in the West who might fit into the hectic Russian tradition, but they are distinctly the exception. European socialist agitation was basically humane, surcharged with pity for the poor and exploited. But the very idea of pity is incompatible with Bolshevism and its background.

Russia's history is exceptionally blood-soaked and bes-

tial. Its Czars kill one another and murder their sons with their own hands. Adventurers repeatedly seize the throne. A Peter throws hundreds of thousands of lives into the construction of a city out of swampland; he remains none the less barbarian, perhaps more so, when he tries to "civilize" and Westernize his realm. A Catherine the Great manages to be a "liberal" in her correspondence with Voltaire and others, while remaining savagely autocratic at home. Great changes come to Europe, right across its borders, but Russia remains hermetically sealed, intellectually stifled, politically corrupt and morally complacent. Out of this ground comes beauty, too—great music, great poetry, noble visions. But they do not alter the character of that history. Russia's story is filled with desperations, pogroms, terrors, sadistic rulers. Above all, a vast distance ever separates the mass of ordinary people from the handful of plotting, fighting, erratic and self-willed masters at the top.

It is out of this history that Bolshevism evolved. And Bolshevism was the faith which Stalin automatically, inevitably, embraced, and within which his ambitions would hew a path to power. He invented nothing. Every crime that he was to commit in due time—whether the liquidation of the kulaks or the invasion of Finland—was already prescribed by the intellectual ancestors of the Bolsheviks, or actually put into practice on a smaller scale.

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## VII

### CRIME FOR THE CAUSE

THE NEARLY TOTAL ECLIPSE of Stalin in the broad daylight of the 1905 revolution is a warning that we must not let our knowledge of his future eminence distort our view of him in the formative years. Under the policed exterior of the Russian Empire there existed a second Russia, desperate and romantic and furiously busy excavating under the monarchy. It was an underground world with secret passages into every department of Russian society.

Stalin was one of the myriad denizens of this extraordinary underworld of revolution, without parallel in any other nation. Besides the Social Democrats—split into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks—there were other groups: Social Revolutionaries, anarchists. There was no love lost among these competing revolutionaries. The leaders of this nether world were sometimes in prison cells, sometimes in frozen Siberian regions. Most often, however, they were in European cities, living in garrets, foregathering in dingy cafés, gesticulating in smoke-filled meeting halls.

Others wrote books, made eloquent speeches in open court, or plotted safely in Vienna, Zurich, London. Stalin enjoyed none of these satisfactions. He was one of those who remained at home, doing the dirty chores of the revolutionary propaganda. Those who later intoned eulogies to him counted it as Stalin's greatest merit that he



did not follow the easier and pleasanter path of foreign exile.

But it is not alone heroism and devotion to the cause that decided this. The fact is that Stalin did not fit into the Europe where the Lenins, Martovs, Plekhanovs and Trotskys were arguing so thunderously and mapping out larger strategy. He would have been out of place among them intellectually, being no match for these men on any level except that of action. He would have been miserable psychologically, knowing no foreign languages, having no gift for mixing with strange people, and feeling himself awkward except among his own kind.

The few times when Stalin did go into Europe, as delegate to Bolshevik congresses, must have left him with a bitter taste on the palate of his mind. No one seemed aware of his presence. The émigré press was too full of the polemic lightning of the great ones in the movement to notice the taciturn, seemingly shy provincial delegate. Occasionally, in committee rooms, where shrewdness counted for more than eloquence, he showed his mettle. In the limelight, he was lost in the shadows cast by the others. Those who obscured him were to learn decades later how such things can rankle in a Caucasian heart.

In 1906 Stalin came to the Stockholm conference of the party, as representative of a small group of Bolsheviks in Tiflis. The records of that meeting show that he spoke up three times—and each time was elbowed aside, wiped out, with a few retorts by celebrated party leaders. The following year he showed up again at a London conference. For all the contribution he made to discussion and decisions, he might as well not have been

there. The revolution was at its wordiest stage, and Stalin was not a man of words.

In his time of triumph, Stalin once talked about those foreign conferences. He quoted Lenin as having "given expression to his hatred for whining intellectuals." It is hard to believe that Lenin, all of whose colleagues were intellectuals and himself one, would have put it that way. "Whining intellectuals" is more probably an echo of how Stalin himself felt about all those speechifying, over-bright delegates. He also quoted Lenin as having told his group: "Finish your enemy, for he is only beaten but still far from dead." That is more in Stalin's style than Lenin's. Whatever Lenin had really said, it stuck in Stalin's memory for so many years in the shape of a Caucasian aphorism.

No, Stalin remained in Russia, in his native environment, among the crude people who understood him, because that was the only place where he could function. Eventually he was to erect his personal political machine on just such crude people.

There can be no doubt that he resented the superior minds, the showy talents and the safer existence of the exiles. It was as though his whole life would be a repetition of the same hateful pattern. Had he not resented the schoolmates from more comfortable and more cultured homes in Gori, and later the seminarists who received money and packages from their parents? But he would show them all some day. His appetites were sharpened by denial. For long years he remained the "hall sweeper" of the movement, waiting his chance to sweep the grand gentry of the intellect into the "dustbin of his-

tory." In some instances he waited twenty years, thirty in others, but in the end he did sweep them all out of his path.

The grimmest of the chores that fell to his lot is never mentioned in the official Soviet literature on Stalin. Yet it is the one that finally brought him closer to Lenin. Others met the leader by reason of their writings, their oratory, or other mental achievements. Stalin endeared himself by exploits of banditry for the cause.

The polite word for it was "expropriations," and it was one phase of the "partisan" or guerrilla warfare conducted against Czarism by its enemies. Put bluntly, the expropriations were bold robberies carried out to finance the revolutionary movement. Terrorism has flourished in other places, but here it went to distinctly Russian extremes. The chief victims were government bureaus and banks, but often enough private individuals were attacked.

After the abortive revolution of 1905, liberal and revolutionary organizations were smashed, thousands were sent into exile, every attempt to bring ideas to a dark people was crushed. Revolutionists decided to answer terror with more terror. Government officials, from premiers down, were blown to fragments. But terror, too, requires financing. So the expropriations spread. They spread to an extent where they merged into ordinary crime. In time some of the expropriators themselves forgot where the cause ends and garden variety banditry begins. Even the defenders of this method of revolutionary action became alarmed by the degeneration it brought into the movement.

The Social Democrats repeatedly went on record in

opposition to individual terror and expropriation. Formally, the Lenin faction accepted the party decision. But off-record the Bolsheviks countenanced and encouraged the robberies. Lenin himself, together with Krassin and Bogdanov, directed some of the work from a distance. Having turned conspiracy into a full-time profession, their organization was under obligation to support its army of fighters. Money was sorely needed, and Lenin had none of the squeamishness of his Menshevik comrades.

So it was in these exploits that Stalin at last was able to distinguish himself. If the Caucasus led all the rest in the number and the daring of the expropriations much of the credit went to Stalin.

Of all the expropriators the most remarkable was Ter-Petrossian, known to Russian history as Kamo—a nickname bestowed on him by Stalin. Kamo played with his own life and other people's lives as a child plays with a ball. His story and his legend are stranger than anything in adventure fiction. His private revolutionary code justified all crimes for the cause, and his character enabled him to practice what he preached. He robbed and murdered for the Bolshevik cause. It is told of Kamo that once he was present when someone argued with a Menshevik. "Why argue with him?" he broke into the dispute. "Let me cut his throat."

In the Caucasus this Kamo operated with a small band of confederates. Parts of his career are still shrouded in mystery, to protect those associated with him. But already it is clear that Kamo, in the years of his major robberies, 1906 and 1907, was in a large measure under the influence of Stalin. The relation went beyond discipline. A

half-literate fellow, Kamo looked up to Stalin respectfully as his Caucasian *abrek*.

There were many arrests in connection with the murderous expropriations. Stalin was never arrested in this connection. For the first time he was showing clearly the talent that would bring him his greatest political victories: his ability to use others to do needed but dangerous work. Through Kamo and others he was able to help replenish the Bolshevik coffers. It is altogether unlikely that Stalin personally ever robbed a bank or held up a shipment of money. There is no doubt that he helped organize such expeditions, and helped dispose of the proceeds.

The most melodramatic of these political crimes stirred all Russia. On the morning of June 26, 1907, two carriages, surrounded by an armed Cossack escort, were driving from the Tiflis post office to the bank. As they crossed Erivan Square in the heart of the city, a series of bombs were hurled. The explosions were heard for miles around and panic swept the city. When the smoke cleared the square was strewn with bodies. A uniformed officer appeared on the scene, shooting into the air, and apparently chasing the attackers.

The "officer" was Kamo. The whole bloody episode had been carefully planned, and the gang got away with 340,000 rubles, approximately \$170,000. Three persons had been killed and fifty wounded. The expropriated cash, mostly in 500-ruble notes, soon began to show up in Europe, and a few arrests were made. Maxim Litvinov, later Stalin's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, was taken into custody for a period in Paris when he tried to ex-

change these notes. It is now known that Lenin, Krassin and Bogdanov, the triumvirate who directed these activities, received the Tiflis booty. Because in the end the money became too "hot," Lenin destroyed a large portion of it.

The much-repeated story of the Tiflis crime usually describes Stalin as among the revolutionary bandits. This is false. A number of detailed accounts of the affair have been published, the most credible by the widow of Kamo. None of them credits Stalin with direct participation. He was the "brains" of the crime, functioning safely in the background.

The scandal created by the Tiflis robbery frightened even the Bolsheviki into abandoning this type of activity for the time being. The Social Democratic Party investigated the whole thing. Stalin was adjudged guilty, along with a few of his close friends, and they were expelled from the party. It was an empty formality so far as Stalin was concerned. He was not interested in the party—his allegiance, like the allegiance of the whole Leninist group, was to the Bolshevik faction. He realized that Lenin could not defend him aloud, when popular opinion was incensed against the Tiflis tragedy, but he knew that Lenin approved and admired the "perfection" of the job.

What he could not accomplish with his pen or his voice, he accomplished with bombs. What is more, the cunning mountain *abrek* got others to do the bomb-throwing. Not a penny of the loot went into his own pocket; petty dishonesty was not in Stalin's nature. But all the glory went into his pocket.

At the same time Stalin was learning to manage tough

and desperate men. In his own narrow sphere the seminarist had become a leader. Not a leader of the "whining intellectuals" whom he despised, but of rugged men like the fabulous Kamo. A political prisoner who had spent some time in the same prison with Stalin has written in his memoirs that Stalin avoided the "politicals." He preferred to associate with the real criminals. He made friends of them.

## VIII

### BAKU AND PRISONS

THE VOCATION OF FULL-TIME agitator and conspirator left no margin of leisure for a private existence. Whatever our judgment of the youthful Stalin's hunger for authority or of his utterly cynical methods, there can be no two opinions about his zeal for his chosen cause. Thousands of young Russians whose student enthusiasms took them into the revolutionary movement, soon abandoned it for safe and humdrum lives as family men and job-holders. Only the toughest, the most fanatic—and the most ambitious—remained in the hard, dangerous and unprofitable career.

Life for Stalin, as for all citizens of the political underground, added up to uneasy intervals between imprisonments and exiles. He was an outlaw, without permanent home or permanent name. Now he was Koba, tomorrow David, Nizheradze, Tchizhikov, Ivanovich, Stalin. Now he roomed with some oil worker's family, now in a peasant's hut in the suburbs. Repeatedly he went into hiding for periods to throw police spies off the trail. Often he spent the night in the streets for fear that his temporary home was being watched.

There were compensations, too, for the hardships and horrors of such an existence. The devotees, few and persecuted, had the sense of importance that sustains ardent



conspirators. Theirs was the inspiring conviction that truth was on their side and tomorrow also vindication. Penniless, hunted by the police, denied the psychological comforts of family and non-political friendships, they lived intensely and adventurously. They had the intenser comradeship of a faith and dangers shared with other dedicated men and women. There is no call to pity those who made insurrection their vocation. On the contrary: from their level of fanatic ecstasy they looked down in scorn and pity on the drably respectable creatures of the everyday world. There was more of contempt than of envy in their feelings for the smugly vegetating lives around them.

At the age of twenty-four, in 1903, Stalin married the young and illiterate sister of a Georgian comrade, Catherine Svanidze. She remains scarcely more than a flitting shadow on his life. A meek, deeply devout girl, oriental in her submission to a man's world, she did not inquire into her husband's preoccupations. Having grown up in the hushed, secretive atmosphere of a home that harbored revolutionists, she accepted these preoccupations as somehow important, without quite comprehending them. She scarcely came to know the thin, beetle-browed, unsmiling Soso whom she had married; always he was disappearing, for months at a time, into other cities, into prisons, into hiding.

Stalin now had two Catherines, his wife and his mother to pray for him before corner icons and to weep over his godless life and repeated arrests.

After four years of this pathetic married life, his wife died of tuberculosis, leaving a boy child, Yasha, with her

family. For ten years, until the great revolution freed his father from an exile beyond the Arctic Circle, the boy remained with his mother's family. Then he was brought to the Kremlin, where he played with the children of Trotsky and other new masters of Russia. But his father remained, and remains to this day, essentially a stranger to him.

After the expropriation exploits in the Tiflis region, Stalin moved to Baku, which became the principal scene of his activity for about three years. Baku was a city of startling contrasts. In a few decades it had mushroomed into a modern oil center, where the Deterdings, Urquharts, Rothschilds and Russian capitalists were pumping fortunes from the bowels of the earth.

But under the bustle of modern industry, it retained its Asiatic character, crowded, smelly and teeming with life. Peasants from all corners of the Czar's empire, nomads from the Central Asian steppes, Turkomans, Persians, Armenians, Caucasian mountaineers, all flocked to Baku for work. They piled up in its "black town" of narrow, filthy alleys. As late as 1933, when I was there last, Baku was still authentically Eastern, its industrial life little more than a veneer.

It was a fertile field for a revolutionist of Stalin's temper. The fine rhetoric of the intellectuals didn't get far with these primitive, overworked and embittered masses. Stalin and his group, calling for the Great Change now, at one blow, found followers. Their over-simplification of complex problems into strong, blunt slogans of action stunned workers into acquiescence, where the arguments

of the Mensheviks failed to make an impression. Though the Bolshevik faction was losing out in Georgia as a whole, it flourished in industrial Baku. The Mensheviks accused Stalin and his friends of grabbing control of the Baku Committee of the Social Democratic Party by methods less than honest. The accusations did not distress the Bolsheviks. The point was to hold control, not how you obtained it. The future Bolshevik historians of the period would record (as a boast, be it noted, not in apology) that Stalin "squeezed out the Mensheviks" from the workers' groups in Baku. There is no suggestion of sweet reasonableness in the process of squeezing.

Stalin edited a Bolshevik paper, the *Baku Worker*. He took part in strike activities among the oil workers. He was often among the groups of outsiders who appeared at the clandestine gatherings of discontented workers. Sometimes he would come forward and talk to them in the gruff, unadorned style that was natural to him. In workingman's clothes, an old cap pulled down over his thick bristly hair, he must have looked like one of them. I have myself seen dozens of Caucasians on the streets of Tiflis and Baku who looked like the photographs of the Stalin of this period come to life.

In March, 1908, he was arrested—just one in a large police haul of agitators. The Bayilov Prison, in Baku, which normally could hold some four hundred inmates, was crowded by fifteen hundred. Here Koba remained for nearly eight months. Out of this period has come a story which may safely be credited because it has been told by a political enemy of his, one Semion Vereshchak. On Easter Day, the soldiers quartered at the prison, to

amuse themselves or to put fear into the hearts of the "politicals," made the prisoners run the gantlet between two rows of swinging fists and rifle butts. Others cringed, covered themselves. But one walked through slowly, contemptuously, without lowering his head, a book under his arm. The story has been expanded and embroidered by Stalin's encomiasts, but that there is steel in his make-up no one can question.

From the same Vereshchak we have the most complete description of the early Stalin that has yet come to light. They were fellow prisoners and both were members of the committee which regulated affairs inside the prison—under the free and easy regime that often prevailed in Czarist prisons. Vereshchak writes that the prison was "a training school for political revolutionists, a kind of propagandist institution, a militant academy." Noting that Koba was prominent among the Marxists in this "institute," he proceeds to describe him:

"He wore a blue satin smock, with a wide open collar, without a belt. His head was bare. A *bashlyk*—a sort of detached hood with two tapering scarfs—was thrown across his shoulders. He always carried a book. Of more than medium height, he walked with a slow catlike tread. He was slender, with pointed face, pock-marked skin, sharp nose, and small eyes looking out from under a narrow forehead, slightly indented. He spoke little and sought no company.

"The Stalin of those days was defiant. He submitted to no regulations. The political prisoners at Baku endeavored to segregate themselves as much as possible from the criminal convicts. The younger political prisoners

were punished if they infringed upon this unwritten law. Openly flouting this custom, Koba was constantly to be seen in the company of bandits, swindlers and thieves. He chose as his cell-mates the Sokvadelidze brothers, one a counterfeiter, the other a well known Bolshevik. Active people, people who did things, attracted him."

In the political controversies that agitated the "institute," Stalin did not waste effort in individual discussion. He was always for organizing a debate. Again according to his fellow-prisoner:

"I shall never forget an agrarian debate organized by Koba at which his comrade, Sergei Ordzhonikidze . . . brought home his conclusion by striking his fellow-speaker, the Socialist Revolutionary, Ilya Kartsevadze, in the face, for which he received a thorough thrashing from the Social Revolutionaries.

"Koba's personal appearance and his rudeness in controversy made him an unpleasing speaker. His speeches lacked wit and his statement of his case was dry. His mechanized memory was astounding."

Ordzhonikidze would avenge that thrashing amply in due time; as one of Stalin's chief lieutenants in the Kremlin, he would have the entire police force at his disposal. And Stalin would as amply avenge the feeling of being disliked by those with whom he argued. That dislike was mixed with a certain awe. Vereshchak recalls that "his remarkable lack of principle and his practical cunning made him a master of tactics," and that he hated especially those whose arguments he could not answer. The future Stalin begins to peep out from this description of one obscure Baku prisoner by another.

Vereshchak also tells a prison story to illustrate Koba's "capacity of secretly urging others to action while himself remaining aloof." The story shows Koba in the act of "originating a rumor" about a young prisoner, to the effect that he was a police spy. The rumor won that prisoner a brutal beating. On another occasion a "political" stabbed a prisoner whom he thought was a spy. Later it turned out that the victim was innocent. The man who did the stabbing revealed that "the instigation came from Koba."

Because some of the items in Vereshchak's description are flattering, Stalin's own mouthpiece, *Pravda*, would one day certify it as "correct." Yet the whole picture is one that Stalin can scarcely relish. Boris Souvarine, having analyzed it, sums up the characteristics of the dictator-to-be as already evident at this early Baku date.

"The first is a 'will to power' disproportionate to the will to know. . . . The second characteristic is a narrow realism, efficacious within strict limits; and with a lack of appreciation of theory or of general ideas—a temper of mind inherited from his peasant ancestors. The third is a religious education overlaid with a travesty of Marxism consisting of elementary formulae learned by heart like a catechism, and lastly, oriental dexterity in intrigue, unscrupulousness, lack of sensitiveness in personal relations, and scorn of men and human life."

From prison Koba was sent out to Vologda Province, but escaped in a few months and early in 1909 he was back in his Baku haunts. Again he dodged the police, forming workers' groups and writing rough pamphlets in Georgian and Russian—so rough that they have never

been republished as have been every scrap of Lenin's or Trotsky's writing. Again he was fighting fiercely against the moderate socialists, Social Revolutionaries, anarcho-syndicalists. To these people, Stalin seemed an unprincipled adventurer ready to spill blood uselessly. To him, in turn, they were heretics, to be stamped out along with the gendarmes and exploiters of the old regime.

Twenty years later, on Stalin's fiftieth birthday, one of his chief flatterers, Lazar Kaganovich, exclaimed: "His most noteworthy and characteristic feature is just this, that during the whole course of his party political activity he never left Lenin, never vacillated either to the right or to the left."

The statement is an exaggeration. On rare occasions when he ventured into policy discussion Stalin did vacillate and advance points out of line with Lenin's views. But in the larger sense Kaganovich's assertion is true. He intended it as high compliment. Yet no more damning comment on Stalin's limitations could have been made by any detractor. Stalin followed his leader blindly, through the most violent changes of view, without troubling excessively to understand or to complain. After all, Lenin himself did vacillate sharply. He had the courage to experiment, to retreat. Others argued with Lenin, broke with him on specific issues, then returned to him.

But Stalin held on tight and merely swung along. He contributed only his energy, being more interested in the organization than its beliefs, in the instrument than in what it would accomplish. Later, when he became sole master, it would not seem to him too much to expect a whole party, a whole nation, the entire international

organization, to swing along blindly, unquestioningly, through violent reversals of policy. The leader came first—and therefore he must be leader.

He was arrested again in 1910, and after a few months of prison was returned to the Vologda Province. Escaping in the following year, it was no longer considered safe for Stalin to show up in Baku. Besides, since his hold-up exploits he had registered on Lenin's consciousness. The Bolshevik faction ordered him to St. Petersburg, the capital of Czarism.

The "rustic" and provincial had graduated into national affairs. Here was the Duma, in which there were Bolshevik members. Here the most important personalities in the party were sure to visit, always secretly, when they returned to Russia. Stalin received "directives" from the leaders abroad and carried them out energetically. But he took no part in the tempestuous theoretical disputes, he initiated nothing in the sphere of ideas. At most he repeated on a cruder level the arguments of his party superiors. Except when he tired even of that, and sneered at all the finely drawn controversy.

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## IX

### "THE WONDERFUL GEORGIAN"

POLICE OPPRESSION was more ruthless than ever. The Okhrana, forerunner and model for the Cheka and G.P.U. of later years, acquired its greatest power. Prisons were filled and the Siberian wilderness swarmed with exiles. The dull-witted Czar; his hysterical German Czarina, their myriad flatterers, their mystical hangers-on—all consoled themselves that insubordination had been crushed forever.

Most revolutionaries were inclined to agree with them. A pessimistic defeatist spirit ruled in the political underground. Thousands of erstwhile rebels gave up the struggle as hopeless and relapsed into respectability. Those who remained tended to accept more moderate views; they were impressed with the difficulties and the need for slow progress. The Bolshevik nucleus that remained intact despite the police persecutions and psychological pressures, therefore, represented the hardest of the hard. Stalin was unswervingly among them.

But soon events began to dispel the hopelessness. The spirit of rebellion was flaring up again here and there. The masses were beginning to thaw out from the freezing defeat of 1905-06 and the reaction that followed. Émigré Russian circles smelled the new upsurge, and the debates

among the factions grew more raucous than ever. The Mensheviks were committed to European models, especially the growing and influential Social Democratic Party of Germany. But Lenin and his partisans never felt Russia as part of Europe; they felt that it had inner laws of its own. Instinctively they worked toward a revolution in the tradition of Russia's history of hyperbolic and bloody upsets.

Above the clash of factions was heard, as always, the cry for unity, for compromise. Everybody talked unity, but Plekhanov said: "Lenin wants the unity of the party but he understands it as a man understands unity with a piece of bread; he swallows it." Trotsky, affiliated with neither Right nor Left, demanded a sensible compromise. He assailed Lenin as a "professional exploiter of all the backward elements in the Russian workers movement" and insisted that "the whole edifice of Leninism is founded on lies and falsifications and carries within itself the poison germ of its own decomposition." Lenin retorted in kind. "People like Trotsky," he wrote, "are the plague of our time . . . a diplomat of the basest metal. . . ."

Every last word in these disputes, which continued during many years, would be disinterred one day by Stalin and used to drive Trotsky out of power. But now, settled in the capital for the first time, Stalin was chiefly annoyed by the squabbles. He resented the safety and the leisure abroad that made the elaborate bickerings possible. His contempt for the talkers, the hair-splitters, shows through in a letter he wrote at this time:

"We have heard talk of the storm in a teacup abroad, the Lenin-Plekhanov bloc on the one hand and the Trot-

sky-Martov-Bogdanov bloc on the other. So far as I know the workers favor the first. But, generally speaking, they begin to look with scorn on doings abroad. Let them do what they like; as for us, if a man has the interests of the movement at heart and does his work, the rest can be arranged. This is the best way in my opinion."

"They" look with scorn on the "Europeans"—which is to say that Stalin was looking with scorn upon them. For men living in constant danger of arrest, the formulas lost their fine edge. It was better to hold on to a few simple, irreducible ideas and do your work before the gendarmes swooped down.

In 1912 the Czarist regime had notice that the subterranean fires were not dead. In the distant Lena gold-fields of northern Siberia, the workers went on strike. The police tried to suppress them, and rounded up the ringleaders. When the workers gathered to demand the release of their spokesmen, soldiers opened fire. Nearly five hundred were killed. When the news percolated to the greater Russia, strikes broke out everywhere in protest. On May Day that year over a million men quit work to show their feelings. Russia had been awakened out of its torpor.

A young lawyer volunteered to defend the Lena strike leaders. His name was Alexander Kerensky. No one paid much attention to him, either then or when he was elected to the Duma. In 1917 he was to head the government that superseded the Czarist regime.

The rift in the Social Democratic movement of Russia that had started in London in 1903 became a final break in 1912. A conference of Bolsheviks summoned by

Lenin in Prague, set itself up as a separate party and declared war on all other parties. It selected a Central Committee of seven members which in turn arbitrarily added two more. One of these was Stalin who was not even at the conference.

It is today Stalin's principal item of pride that he has been in the Central Committee of the party which came to rule Russia from its very beginning. But it needs to be noted that he was not elected to the post. He was drafted, "co-opted," by the leaders. Neither then nor ever thereafter would he rise on the rungs of the party ladder because of popular support or popular accomplishments. He lacked the spark that electrifies the millions. His every advance was through the mechanism of the organization, as a henchman's reward for service or a henchman's price for his help.

It was about this time that he began to use the name Stalin. How and why he came to choose it is not known, except that it was fashionable among young Bolsheviks to select "tough" pseudonyms. "Molotov" derives from *molot*, a hammer; "Kamenev" from *kamen*, a stone. A Jewish Social Revolutionary, Stalinsky, like the Caucasian Djughashvili, took *stal*, steel, as the basis for his name. The legend that Lenin gave the name to Stalin is pure invention. In any case, this Stalin was now in the highest organ of authority of his Bolshevik organization. Slowly, painstakingly, without a single display of brilliance anywhere on the way, without a single contribution to the philosophy or literature of the organization, he had climbed to the top. To the general membership of the party he was practically unknown, but the top men had recognized

his usefulness. Lenin had no need for more brains; his circle had plenty and to spare. He did need more brawn, more cold daring, more obedience. These he found in Stalin.

Men like Mussolini and Hitler, Lenin and Trotsky, make their own revolutions. They are supreme demagogues, or spell-binders, men who win the worship of millionfold masses. But Stalin could only participate in such revolutions, since he had none of the dynamic talents that mobilize and move mobs. We see him among the few dozen uppermost leaders of Bolshevism, but regarded by all of them—if they noticed him at all—as a vigorous tool rather than an equal associate.

Soon after his designation to the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, Stalin was again arrested. His new importance made him that much more exposed to the Okhrana's attentions. All the revolutionary organizations were honeycombed with police agents, many of whom achieved positions of leadership. The revered and glamorous chief of the Social Revolutionary terrorist organization, Azev, had turned out to be a spy of long standing. Every rebel had always the gnawing awareness that his closest comrade, the seemingly ardent revolutionist, might in reality be a spy and an *agent provocateur*.

The Bolsheviks, as a Left grouping, were of special interest to the police and consequently more deeply infested than the rest. In the small gathering in Prague which formed the party, at least three were police stooges. They were among the most insistent upon breaking relations with the Mensheviks—the prevention of unity was one of the tasks of the police.

At one time, soon before the revolution, three out of seven members of the Bolshevik Committee in St. Petersburg were on the Secret Service payrolls. Indeed, the Bolshevik spokesman in the Duma, one Malinovsky, who read the speeches written for him abroad by Lenin, was subsequently unmasked as a spy and duly shot. Alexander Troyanovsky (destined to be the first Soviet Ambassador to the United States) had warned Lenin against Malinovsky, as did others. But Lenin protected his St. Petersburg mouthpiece. Unlike others in his party, he was slow to use the dread word spy against comrades.

In any case, Stalin's new weight in the councils of revolution was immediately known to the authorities. This time he was sent to the distant Narym. Again he escaped, however, and remained at liberty long enough to visit Lenin at Cracow. It was then that Lenin referred to him as "the wonderful Georgian." There was an undertone of belittlement in the expression that Stalin has not been able to live down. A curious creature we can use to advantage, Lenin implied.

On this rare and brief excursion into Europe, Stalin paused at Vienna. There he had a confrontation which seemed trifling at the moment, but looms dramatically in retrospect. For the first time and for only a few seconds, he came face to face with Trotsky. Of course he knew Trotsky—who in the movement didn't? But Trotsky decidedly did not know Stalin—few as yet did. Writing from his present Mexican refuge, Trotsky recently recalled the moment. It was at the home of a Georgian exile. "Suddenly," he wrote, "without a preceding knock, the door opened and in it appeared a person unknown to me—of average height and

rather thin, with a sallow face on which could be seen pockmarks."

The new arrival "uttered a guttural sound which could, had one wished, be taken for a greeting," filled a tea-glass from the samovar, and left without a word. That was all; a few seconds' prelude to the greatest political duel in modern times. Trotsky's friend explained: "That was the Caucasian, Djughashvili, my fellow-countryman. He recently entered the General Committee of the Bolsheviks and is evidently beginning to play an important role." Looking back at the meeting, Trotsky remembers especially Stalin's "morose concentration." It fits into our growing understanding of Stalin the introvert, tensed and brooding inside, despite his capacity for action.

The "wonderful Georgian" did not remain free long enough to be used by Lenin. In the spring of 1913 he was taken into custody again and, after about four months in a St. Petersburg jail, was packed off to Turukhansk Province, remotest Polar outpost of the Czarist empire, where the river Yenissei empties into the Arctic Ocean. There a small group of prisoners whom the Okhrana considered most dangerous were kept under military guard. The group was enlarged in the following years until it counted several hundred, quartered in the widely scattered villages and hamlets of the region. Stalin and another young Bolshevik, Jacob Sverdlov, were sent to far-off Kureika, a few huts in the bleakness, and a couple of gendarmes were assigned to watch them.

A world war and a revolution took place while Stalin fished and hunted and brooded in the Arctic. Other prisoners were conscripted into the army after a while. Because of

his warped left arm, Stalin was exempted. Other revolutionists under similar conditions wrote books, studied foreign languages, played with social theories. Stalin had no such mental resources. But he had ample patience. He lived a vigorous life physically, but he had nothing to show otherwise for nearly five years of solitude. He merely waited.



## X

### IN ARCTIC EXILE

STALIN WAS LIVING under his own name in the Turuk-Shansk Province. Memoirs and letters of revolutionists who shared the exile with him refer to him, if at all, as Djugashvilli. An amusing sidelight is provided by a note from Lenin, still extant, addressed to one Karpinsky. From Geneva, Lenin wrote:

"Great favor to ask of you; find out the last name of Koba (Joseph Dj——, we have forgotten). It is very important."

This was in November, 1915. Technically the exiled Stalin was a member of the highest organ of the Bolshevik organization. But Lenin himself knew him only as Koba and couldn't remember his real name!

In Kureika, Stalin and Sverdlov shared a room in a peasant's hut, under the most primitive conditions. Sverdlov occupies a special niche in the pantheon of Bolshevik heroes. Still in his twenties when the revolution came, he was to be the first President of the Soviet Republic, until assassinated in 1918. A Jewish intellectual, a man of warm and affectionate disposition, he doubtless made every effort to be friendly with the gruff, unresponsive Caucasian. But his efforts failed. The two men were incompatible.

Had anyone suggested to Sverdlov that his unpleasant room-mate might one day be master of all Russia, he would



#### IN ARCTIC EXILE

Stalin is standing, second from the left, in this photograph of political exiles beyond the Arctic Circle, taken in 1915. In the same row with Stalin, in a white blouse, is Jacob Sverdlov, later the first President of Soviet Russia.



have thought it merely funny. Sverdlov's letters from exile, addressed to a woman friend, have survived. The occasional references to Stalin are generous—"a good fellow," he says at one point—but it is clear that his opinion of the Georgian is none too high:

"There are two of us here. The Georgian, Djugashvili, is with me, an old acquaintance whom I had met in exile before. He is a good fellow, but too much of an individualist in his everyday conduct. I, on the other hand, am a believer in a minimum of orderliness. On this point, I sometimes get nervous."

And on another occasion:

"I have a comrade with me? Yes. But we know each other too well. Moreover, and that is the saddest part of it all, in conditions of exile and prison, man bares himself and reveals himself in all his pettiness. It is a pity that he displays only the pettiness of life. There is no room to show one's big side. We now live in separate quarters and see each other but rarely."

Thus Sverdlov, in his generosity, blamed Stalin's pettiness and surliness on conditions. He reduced his specific dislike for a fellow-exile to a general law. But despite this stratagem we thus have another instance of the future dictator's inability to make friends, his natural rudeness and lack of those intellectual passions which might have drawn him close to the mentally alert young Sverdlov.

Another document referring to this period must be discounted insofar as it seeks to throw a romantic glamour around Stalin, because it was written retrospectively, when Stalin was already the master. It is useful only in revealing the bare physical facts of Stalin's life. The memoir, by one

Shumiatsky, declares that Stalin's arrival in the Arctic province "was preceded by legendary reports of his ability to escape under any conditions. He had a record of seven escapes. The party members, however, did not know that the 'fierce' Stalin was a member of the Central Committee."

And of Stalin's life in exile:

"He surrounded himself with heaps of meshing, casting-net, muzzles, shotguns, automatic traps, seines, blocks, baskets, etc. . . . He cast his nets under the ice, he disemboweled his catch himself, and even wove his own nets and made other equipment. He chopped wood, cooked his own food, and found time to work on his manuscripts. And all the while he was under the sharp watch of a special constable."

The several hundred political exiles in Turukhansk were a microcosm of the revolutionary movements. They carried their factional differences with them. Passionate argument, often touched by murderous bitterness, filled their lives. Stalin remained apart from it all. He saw no profit in obtaining recognition or leadership from the small colony of helpless talkers. He kept himself aloof, active in solitude, uncommunicative.

When Russia entered the World War, the Lenin group took a clear-cut "defeatist" position. Workers and peasants, they said, had no interest in who won or lost the contest in carnage. Their job was to overthrow all the governments and to convert the national wars into civil rebellions. "Defeatist" elements in other Russian parties joined Lenin in this view. Even "defeatists" in other than Russian parties—like Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Liebknecht of Germany—joined him.

The war had practically destroyed the Socialist International. The majorities of all the national parties were supporting their own governments in the war. (The Socialist Party of the United States, under the leadership of Eugene V. Debs and Morris Hillquit, was one of the few that remained internationalist and anti-war even after American's entry into the struggle.) The "defeatist" groups—few and without influence at the moment—met in two secret conferences, at Zimmerwald and at Kienthal, and in both Lenin was the dominant figure. Angelica Balabanoff, herself a Russian but participating as representative of the Italian group, was the secretary of the Zimmerwald gathering. These conferences are generally regarded by Bolsheviks as the beginnings of the Third or Communist International which would in time be launched formally in Bolshevik Moscow.

Of all this Stalin knew little and apparently cared little. He had ample leisure amidst his fishing and hunting paraphernalia to review his career up to that point. We can imagine how his old contempt for the intellectuals deepened until it became a secret passion of hate. In Switzerland, in Scandinavia, Stalin must have thought, were well-fed and comfortable cosmopolitan leaders, who were taking no risks while he rotted in the Arctic. He had had enough of their hair-splittings, and their "Frenchified" speeches. He, the "hall-sweeper," would show them some day.

Meanwhile Russia's war was degenerating into a ghastly rout. The country was bleeding from all its pores. Whole divisions were being sent into battle without adequate equipment. Men fought without shoes, without food and even without guns. In the capital and in every city, politi-

cal corruption and profiteering grew to plague dimensions. As the death figures mounted into millions, revulsion swept through Russia. This was not war, women shouted in the streets, this was murder. Breadlines lengthened and granaries emptied.

News of the corruption on high percolated down to the starved masses. It became known that high officers were in the pay of the German and Austrian enemy. The weak, dawdling Czar and his hysterical Czarina were under the complete domination of the fantastic Grigori Rasputin—an illiterate and lewd peasant who wielded a strange mystical influence over the imperial family.

In a last desperate move to save the monarchy from disaster, a number of nobles formed a conspiracy to rid the country of Rasputin. On December 12, 1916, Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, Prince Yussoupov and the leader of the extreme Nationalists, the notorious "Black Hundreds," Vladimir M. Purishkevich, poisoned Rasputin in the dining room of the Yussoupov Palace. A few hours later, fearful that the poison might not work, they shot him. But the situation had gone far beyond the point where it could be saved by a palace revolution.

The people assembled by millions in the streets of Russia and demanded peace and bread. The army was ordered to shoot into the crowds of demonstrators. But the soldiers refused to obey their officers. After five sanguinary centuries the sun of the Czars was finally setting. The people exhumed the body of Rasputin and burned it as a symbol that the autocracy was finally destroyed.

The "underground" was exposed to the gaze of a thunderstruck world. The excavators had broken through

the flimsy crust of Czarism. In March, 1917, the Czar abdicated. The hitherto powerless Duma suddenly was the only authority remaining and reluctantly it yielded to pressure and assumed power. A Provisional Government was formed, and soon the young lawyer of the Lena strike five years before, Alexander Kerensky, forged to the head of this government.

From the fronts, soldiers streamed into the capital. They were "voting with their feet," as Lenin put it, by abandoning the war. Those who remained in the war area ceased to obey their officers, formed soldiers' councils or Soviets, and fraternized with the enemy soldiers. When the revolution, at this stage, was over, it was found that there had been less than fifteen hundred victims—fewer than had been shot at the front in fifteen minutes of fighting. In the country, millions of peasants—without instructions, without leadership, in a spontaneous impulse of strength—began to drive out their landlords and overseers and to divide the land among themselves. They had never heard of the Bolsheviks. Neither, for that matter, had the peasant soldiers who flooded all roads or fraternized with the enemy.

The great mass of factory workers in Petrograd and Moscow, centers of the proletarian revolution, likewise knew little if anything of the Bolsheviks. They fought for the revolution, and not for any special group. The differentiation came later, in the midst of the chaos. Now was holiday, an explosion of emotion, a sense of vague "liberation," without much awareness of the vast problems of reorganization ahead.

Indeed, all the theorizing of all the parties were reduced to ashes by the revolution. It came without reference to



prescribed formulas of behavior. Not one of the parties could claim that it "made" the revolution. In the larger sense, the revolution made the parties, forced them to adjust theory to reality, or to perish in the effort. No one had made more to-do than the Bolsheviks about "professional" leadership and readiness to remold the chaos when the old order toppled over. But there were no Bolsheviks around when the revolution happened. The most important among them were abroad. All of them learned of the revolution, like the rest of the world, from the newspapers! Worse than that, the Bolsheviks who happened to be on the scene, or who reached Petrograd in the first weeks after the collapse, were more conscious of the moods of the masses at the moment than of their own theoretical principles. Willy-nilly they merged themselves in the holiday spirit, in the mood of brotherly love and universal jubilation.

The revolution for which generations of martyrs had suffered, which had inspired poets, musicians, dreamers, had come at last. And no one knew quite what to do with it. A huge nation must be fed and clothed and kept warm and protected against enemies. The wheels of industry must be kept running and relations with the rest of the world brought into some logical pattern. Decisions of a thousand kinds must be made. Who would make them and how?

The news of the overturn brought the outlawed, the exiles, the underdogs from their places of hiding. From everywhere they converged on the confused, jubilant, desperate and fantastic Petrograd. From New York, where he had lived for a short while and worked on a revolutionary Russian daily, Leon Trotsky rushed to his homeland. The

British detained him in Canada, but finally consented to let him resume the journey. And from Zurich the German authorities permitted Lenin and a few companions to cross their territory in a sealed train, into Russia. The Kaiser's government felt that it was thus depositing a charge of dynamite in the bowels of that country.

The great tidings penetrated to far-off Turukhansk. Stalin knew that he was free at last to return. Grimly, without haste, without outward emotion, he packed his few shabby belongings for the journey to Petrograd. He had a plan or two of his own to pursue in the mad scramble of parties and individuals for power. From Perm, where Stalin met up with other returning Bolshevik leaders, Lenin in Zurich received this telegram: "*Fraternal greetings. Start today for Petrograd.—Leo Kamenev, M. K. Muranov, J. Stalin.*" Ultimately Kamenev and Muranov would be "liquidated" by the one who stood humbly third in the list of signers.

## XI

### 1917, THE REVOLUTIONARY YEAR

PETROGRAD WAS A CRAZY WHIRLPOOL of parties and slogans, hopes and desperations in March, 1917, when Stalin arrived. Men hailed the dawn of the millennium and women rummaged for a crust of bread. The old order was gone, the new one would not crystallize for years to come. Everybody cheered and shouted and wept and starved. Ostensibly the Provisional Government was in charge. Actually a second authority had arisen: workers' and soldiers' councils or Soviets. Some took orders from the government, some from the Soviets, most people—from nobody.

No one noticed when Stalin, after nearly four years of deadly isolation, arrived in this fevered city. He had made no speeches and stirred no emotions on his way from the Arctic to the capital. The city was not electrified with hope and fear by Stalin's arrival, as it would be some weeks later when Lenin appeared and soon thereafter when Trotsky arrived. Viacheslav Molotov (the same Molotov who is now Premier and Commissar of Foreign Affairs), Shlyapnikov and other secondary personalities among the Bolsheviks had resumed the publication of the defunct *Pravda* immediately after the revolution. It was a thorn in the side of the Provisional government, as it had been of the Czarist government prior to the paper's suppression in 1915. Sta-

lin, Kamenev and Muranov now pushed out these younger comrades and took charge of the paper.

For the first time in his life Stalin had to be a leader, make independent decisions. The control of the paper gave him power in that hectic moment. The struggle against other revolutionary groups was no longer conspiratorial play stuff, but real, solid, heady in its promises. And Stalin muffed the opportunity, muffed it so pathetically that Lenin fumed in his Swiss exile, and later in Petrograd and raked Stalin and his associates on the paper without mercy.

Evidently overwhelmed by the dizzy confusion, Stalin lost his Bolshevik bearings. Despite fourteen years of Lenin's teachings, Stalin came out in *Pravda* with compromise formulas. He failed to envision the social revolution as an immediate possibility. He, Kamenev, and the others before Lenin's arrival were ready to support the bourgeois government in large measure, ready to make common front with the moderates, and even inclined to continue the war—not in defense of the country now, but in defense of the revolution. In the excitement they forgot the great all-devouring social revolution to which their party was pledged.

Confusion was only half the explanation. The other half was practical common sense. German armies surrounded the new Russian revolution, threatened to overrun it. Within the country, counter-revolution was exploding everywhere, and various national regions were breaking the hated Russian bond. All around were overwhelming problems. Stalin, the politician, the opportunist, saw no sense in launching revolutions within the revolution. His native patience counseled compromise, watchful waiting,

until a more propitious time. Let the other parties carry the burden. The compromise line which he, along with Kamenev and Muranov and many others, now put forward was not merely Bolshevik heresy—it was also an expression of Stalin's essential pragmatic instinct.

Stalin and his associates had not grasped Lenin's philosophy, and in a moment of crisis had little but rule-of-thumb "common sense" to rely on. The Menshevik attitude was backed by a philosophy of collaboration with the liberals and the "Democracy." Stalin and his group did not know how to apply their anti-Menshevik principles in practice. Their outward practicality therefore had in it a strong admixture of sheer bewilderment: the situation was too much for them.

The Mensheviks and the other moderate leaders in the government and in the Soviets were jubilant. These Bolsheviks were not such wild men after all! But those among the workers who had been educated in the underground Bolshevik movement to expect a social-economic miracle, not merely a political change, were perturbed. This is how Shlyapnikov recalls the moment:

"When this issue of *Pravda* reached the factories, it there aroused utter dismay among our party members and our sympathizers, and caustic gratification among our opponents. . . . What happened? Why has our newspaper renounced the Bolshevik line and taken the path of defensism? But the Petersburg committee as well as the entire organization, was caught unawares by this *coup*. . . . The indignation in the local districts was enormous, and when the workers found out that *Pravda* had been seized by three former editors of *Pravda* arriving from Siberia, they de-

manded their expulsion from the party."

This un-Leninist attitude on Stalin's part is the blackest mark on his record as a Leninist. Official biographies composed after his apotheosis slur over it. Unofficial biographies, by his enemies, by Trotsky in particular, emphasize it. The fact itself is ineradicable. Without Lenin around, Stalin was no Leninist, but tended rather to an opposite extreme. Trotsky, on the contrary, though theoretically sundered from Lenin, on his own account proposed measures that coincided in essence with Lenin's even before the two met in Petrograd.

Several hundred Bolsheviks were holding a party meeting on April 16, when Lenin suddenly reached Petrograd and hurried to the gathering. Stalin was not alone in his error. Practically all the delegates were talking about collaborating with the bourgeois groups and defending the nation. Lenin was infuriated. He took the floor and for hours excoriated them all as backsliders, traitors and fools. The historian Sukhanov has recorded the occasion:

"It seemed as if all the elements had been let loose from their depths and the spirit of all-destruction knowing no obstacles, doubts, human difficulties and calculations, was sweeping through the hall of Keshinskaya's mansion. I went out into the street and had the feeling of having been beaten on the head with chains all night."

The meeting was humbled, shamed. The Bolsheviks present forgot their speeches and articles of the last weeks and yielded to Lenin. They emerged from the meeting as enemies of the Provisional set-up, at war with all other parties. Nothing short of a total revolution would satisfy them now that Lenin was in charge. All the reins were in

the master's hands, all the shilly-shallying underlings reduced to contrite dust. The Bolshevik machine was being steered head-on for dictatorial power.

From his headquarters in Kseshinskaya's Palace, built by a Romanov Czar for a favorite ballerina, Lenin repeated endlessly the litany of Land, Bread, Peace. Recognizing that the Soviets were the new form of power emerging from the shattered Czarist shell, he clamored for "All power to the Soviets!" He knew how to cut through confusion to the elementary hungers of the masses. Land! Bread! Peace!

It is not within the scope of this chapter to follow the fascinating course of these hectic months of 1917. We are concerned primarily with the role of Stalin. With the arrival of Lenin, Zinoviev, Radek, Dzherzhinsky, Bukharin, Rykov—and above all, Trotsky—the Caucasian *abrek* was shoved unceremoniously into the background. There was no need for shoving—he retreated, taciturn, bitter, sulking.

When Lenin, at that April meeting, poured his scorn on the policies followed until his arrival, Kamenev and others defended themselves feebly. Even Felix Dzherzhinsky, later organizer of the dread Cheka, spoke up for the culprits. Stalin said nothing. Better luck next time. Just now Lenin clearly was the boss and Stalin would hold on tightly to his coat-tails.

Through the accident of transportation difficulties he had been forced for a few weeks to deal with ideas. The experience had proved a dismal fiasco. Not until Lenin would be removed by death, would he seriously meddle with fundamental ideas again. During the rest of that critical year he remained "the wonderful Georgian," able

executive of his master's orders, rarely venturing an opinion. Not a trace of his mind can be found in the Bolshevik program.

The erring and incompetent disciples, having realized their mistakes, were forgiven by Lenin. It did not, and never would in the future, occur to him to demand "recantations." Having won by force of argument, or even by connivance, he forgot misunderstandings and showed no bitterness. Stalin was in no sense punished by Lenin for his blundering; on the contrary, he was loaded with important tasks. Little did these disciples dream that all of them, except Stalin, would have occasion to recant, to confess, to promise conformity a dozen times, only to die before firing squads twenty years later after a final confession. Lenin changed his emphasis repeatedly. Now he talked democracy, now dictatorship, sometimes both in one breath. The simple millions understood little of it all. They heard only the demagogic promises of land and peace and bread, and therefore flocked to Lenin's standard.

From the moment of his return in May, Trotsky became Lenin's right-hand man. Though he had been technically non-Bolshevik, it appeared in the moment of crisis that he was closer to Lenin than most of those who had been in the Bolshevik faction. Lenin and Trotsky—Trotsky and Lenin. Within Russia and throughout the world the names soon became indivisible: the trademark of the revolution. Neither with prohibition or blood has Stalin succeeded in wiping it out.

Stalin was not the only one who resented Trotsky's ascendancy. So many of them had been with the party since 1903, had sacrificed everything for Lenin and Bolshevism.



They felt that Trotsky was a newcomer and interloper. This was not the time for a quarrel. The man's genius as an organizer, an orator, a thinker could not be spared. Besides, Lenin was there to smooth ruffled feathers. But all the bile would come out later when Lenin would be there no longer and when Trotsky's help (or so they thought) could be dispensed with.

In July the Bolsheviks tried a *putsch*. In a sense it was forced upon them by the impatient masses. In any event, it turned out premature. Lenin and Zinoviev went into hiding. Trotsky, Kamenev and others were imprisoned by the Provisional authorities. Stalin remained at liberty—an implied slur on his importance. The new government, like the old, underrated this man. The fact that he was inconspicuous was Stalin's greatest strength. He aroused no envies. Doing the chores, while others shot off the fireworks, he of necessity came closer to other inconspicuous mediocre people in the movement. They came to depend on him. N. Sukhanov, who has recorded this period in many volumes, wrote of him:

"While the corps of officers in the Bolshevik party was of a low level, overwhelmingly casual and ignorant in its composition, its generalship included a row of great figures and worthy leaders. On the other hand, Stalin, in the course of his modest activity in the Executive Committee, made—not only on me—the impression of a gray spot which flickered obscurely and left no trace. In fact there is little more to say about him."

And in all the volumes, Sukhanov finds no reason for mentioning Stalin again. Those around him did not and could not realize until too late that a black spot in the gray-

ness may remain longer than an incandescent spot in the blazing limelight.

With the real leaders away again, Stalin once more was in charge. But this time, he did not go far in originating ideas. He kept in constant touch with the refugee and imprisoned chiefs and merely carried out orders. In August there was a party conference, without Lenin for once. In the minutes of the meeting we find a discussion which seemed minor at the time but in retrospect acquires immense importance. Indeed, in certain remarks of Stalin we see the germ of his entire future policy, even unto his behavior in the European crisis of 1939-40.

The discussion was around the formulation of the party's world-wide objectives. Other delegates referred to the leading role of "the revolutionary proletariat of advanced countries." Stalin's provincial patriotism was apparently offended. He jumped to his feet to protest.

"The possibility is not excluded," he said, "that Russia particularly will be the country that will pave the way toward socialism. . . . The base of our revolution is broader than in Western Europe, where the proletariat finds itself all alone, face to face with the bourgeoisie. . . . One must discard the antiquated idea that only Europe can show us the road. There is such a thing as dogmatic Marxism and creative Marxism. I stand on the latter ground."

There we have Stalin's first recorded expression of his inner certainty that Russia could dispense with the rest of the world. It would boil down in time to the formula "socialism in one country," and ultimately nearly all the delegates present would pay with their lives for doubting

that formula. Now it sounded like the ravings of a narrow, provincial patriot, and no one even listened seriously.

An attempted *coup d'état* by General Kornilov forced all the Left factions into a temporary united front in self-defense. The jailed Bolsheviks were released and Trotsky, in particular, became a popular hero for his part in the rout of Kornilov. By September, control of the city Soviet fell to the Bolsheviks, who therefore intensified their demands for complete power for the Soviets. Trotsky was elected chairman—the post he had occupied for a short while in the abortive revolution twelve years earlier.

Lenin wrote from his hiding place, "The Bolsheviks can and must take power into their hands." Trotsky was one of the few who supported him instantly. But most of the others thought the project a mad adventure. Zinoviev and Kamenev, for instance, publicly exposed what they considered dangerous adventurism. Lenin called them cowards and traitors. Twenty years later this episode would be resurrected by Stalin and made the chief excuse for executing the two old Bolsheviks, though they had fought bravely by Lenin's side when the insurrection came, and thereafter held the highest posts in the Bolshevik hierarchy.

What of Stalin in this fateful hour, when the party was deciding whether to seize control? His behavior underscores his cautious oriental nature. Always he would choose compromise, vagueness, rather than risk open defeat in a straightforward fight. Five days before the uprising he still allowed an editorial in *Pravda* defending those who opposed the seizure—without attacking Lenin and Trotsky who insisted on it. He was leaving the way open for a retreat. He would be with the winning faction, whichever

it might be. On the day before the actual uprising, when the Central Committee met to assign duties, Stalin did not show up at all. That is one way to solve difficult problems. Then, and in all the years that followed, Stalin was the maneuvering machine politician, first and foremost. He was not concerned with fundamental principles as such—not even with “socialism in one country”—except as supports and rationalizations for his political position at a given moment.

Stalin was on the Political Bureau of seven members designated to carry through the *coup*. Actually the Bureau did not come alive; its role has been expanded by Stalinist historians to enlarge his stature in the critical days. Not until 1919 did it begin to supersede the Council of People's Commissars as the repository of power. In time the Bureau would become the dictatorial organ over the Bolshevik party, over Russia, over the communist movement of the world. Of its original members, only Stalin is still there. One, Lenin, was to die a natural death; another, Trotsky, is an exile in Mexico; three—Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bubnov—have been shot by Stalin's orders; the last, Sokolnikov, languishes in one of Stalin's prisons.

There was also a special Committee of Five, and Stalin was on it. Of these, likewise, only Stalin remains. Two—Sverdlov and Uritsky—were to be assassinated by political enemies; one, Bubnov, was to be executed by Stalin; and the fifth, Dzherzhinsky, would die a natural death. In recent years every effort has been made to inflate the part played by this committee, in order to heighten Stalin's importance. Actually it never functioned, its duties being absorbed by the Military Revolutionary Committee of the

Soviet, of which Trotsky was the head. Stalin himself, on the first anniversary, attested that:

"The entire work of the practical organization of the uprising was carried on under the immediate direction of the chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, Trotsky. One may state without hesitation that the party was indebted first and foremost to Comrade Trotsky for the garrison's prompt going over to the Soviet and for the able organization of the work of the Military Revolutionary Committee."

But if his role is being exaggerated in retrospect, it was nevertheless, in the technical sense, a fairly important one. After all, he was among the seven Political Bureau members when, on November 7, 1917, the Bolsheviks carried through the Leninist insurrection.

## XII

### VICTORY WITHOUT GLORY

THOUGH STALIN WAS in the highest councils of the new ruling power, along with Lenin and Trotsky and Zinoviev, his name did not register even in the capital, let alone the outer world. An American journalist, John Reed, chronicled the crucial days of the successful Bolshevik insurrection in a book that has become a classic, *Ten Days that Shook the World*. Stalin is in its pages, but one has to look for him through the index. The forefront of the story is held by others.

Another American, Max Eastman, much later was to search the film archives of the world for visual records of the Russian revolutionary years. He was especially eager to find original movie shots of Stalin in these crowded events, to forestall the inevitable charge by Stalinists that he was ignoring this man's part in the story. But he could find only one scene where Stalin appeared, flittingly, among the shadowy figures in the background.

As late as 1922, I was editing the *Soviet Russia Pictorial*, the first popular magazine devoted to Soviet propaganda in America, and I recall that I did not have occasion to publish Stalin's picture more than once. Other leaders appeared in almost every issue. Anatole Lunacharsky, one of the great Bolshevik personalities of those years, wrote a book of word portraits of outstanding Soviet leaders, under

the title *Silhouettes*. Stalin was not included, even in the 1923 edition.

There we have the amazing paradox of Stalin's career. Among the men who brought the greatest social upheaval since the French Revolution into being; yet unknown, unnoted, slighted by those around him; but in the end inheriting and squandering that whole revolution. No playwright in the memory of man has ever evolved a more fantastically dramatic situation.

Rarely in history has so brilliant a group of men been gathered at one crossroad of time and space as those around Lenin in the Moscow Kremlin, to which the new government soon moved. Let us forget, for the moment, our various judgments of their ideas and their influence on our lives. As an assortment of human beings, it is not easy to find parallels for them.

Lenin himself, regarded even by his enemies with awe as a man of genius. The ascetic, monk-like Bukharin, erratic philosopher. Karl Radek, puckish and devious, dishonest as a matter of principle almost, but unquestionably among the cleverest and best-informed men of our time. The oily and hungrily ambitious Gregory Zinoviev, orator and demagogue extraordinary. The gifted Pole, Felix Dzherzhinsky, half poet, half zealot, who became the head executioner of the revolution. I could go on to detail the vast assemblage of vitality, brains, eloquence represented by such names as Sokolnikov, Sverdlov, Kamenev, Krylenko, Rykov, Chicherin, Lunacharsky, etc.

Then, of course, there was Leon Trotsky, one of those rare miracles of man joining gifts of the mind, a superb sense of drama, and phenomenal energy. His self-assured

brilliance is almost his chief fault: at once a writer, a military strategist, a profound social theorist, and perhaps the greatest orator of his generation. One who watched him in action in the months of the dawning revolution, has written that he "seemed to be speaking simultaneously in all places. Every Petersburg worker knew him and heard him personally." Living in Russia between 1928 and 1934, I talked to a great many men and women who had been through those Petrograd days. Their most vivid recollection was of Trotsky, even more than of Lenin. His name alone electrified the masses.

And among this company was Stalin, the slow-moving, slow-thinking, uninspired hack of the revolution. Stalin could neither write nor speak any more effectively than his own fourth assistants. He might be assigned to negotiate with the representatives of another party, since he was crafty and tenacious. His judgment in matters of political tactics was frequently sound, and Lenin relied on it to a larger extent than the other leaders realized. But there was no use sending him to mass-meetings to placate discontented workers; no use sending him to recalcitrant regiments, unless he came with a stronger and better-armed regiment for the purpose.

One must savor the full contrast between Stalin and his associates in the new regime to credit that hell of hatred against them in his soul which would gradually be revealed to a horrified world.

Stalin was raked by his inferiority complex. In this hour of victory for his party and his cause, there was scant satisfaction for himself. In many ways, as we look back at it, the hour must have been the most tortured in his career.



To be among the leaders yet to have no share in their glory! That must have hurt more than if he had not been among them at all.

The adoring mob somehow failed to see him. Making a principle of necessity, he retreated deeper into the background to register his contempt for such notoriety and for the mob. He knew better than anyone else that he was not an attractive person. Even Lenin, who placed a higher value on the Caucasian than did other members of the government, valued him for what he *did* and not for what he *was*. Stalin knew from the beginning that he could not hope to compete with the scintillating company on their own level of brilliancy. He must therefore make himself at home on a lower level, and wait for the inevitable day when the whole revolution would sag down to that level.

With few exceptions the great names of the new regime were those of former émigrés, of men armed with the cultural resources of Europe. For that very reason Stalin in his own mind emphasized his own Asiatic heritage. He was conscious of a strength beyond the sophistication and emotionalism of the "Europeans" about him. He balanced accounts for the neglect of himself by despising more deeply the intellectual arrogance and facile sentimentality of the brilliant ones.

In later years he would greet a Japanese newspaperman with the statement: "I, too, am an Asiatic." There would be an occasion when someone remarked about his conspicuous politeness to some visitors; and he would comment: "What else, except our politeness, have we Asiatics to meet you Europeans with?" No casual quips are these,

but glimpses of a carefully cultivated pride in being different.

To Trotsky, Stalin at that time seemed a "man without a theoretical viewpoint, without broad political interests"—and therefore unworthy of the notice of a real revolutionary leader . . . like Trotsky. In retrospect he gives Stalin credit only for "energy, persistence and inventiveness in matters of moves behind the scenes." Which, like all judgments, is as much a commentary on the man who makes them as their object. The superiority of Lenin over Trotsky lay precisely in his ability to credit men with what they possessed instead of dismissing them cavalierly for what they did not possess. Trotsky, in his Turkish or Norwegian or Mexican exiles, probably came to have a higher regard for "inventiveness . . . behind the scenes."

Trotsky held the center of the stage, both at home and in the outer world, in the melodramatic negotiations with the victorious Germans at Brest-Litovsk. Few were aware that Lenin, in the Moscow Kremlin, kept Stalin close by his side in making decisions for Trotsky to act upon. Trotsky, for instance, telegraphed on February 15, 1918, from Brest-Litovsk, for instructions. Lenin replied: "I should like to consult first with Stalin before answering your questions." A few days later: "Stalin has just arrived. We will confer with him and immediately give you our joint answer."

In Lenin's Cabinet, Stalin was made Commissar for Nationalities, a post that he kept until it was abolished in 1923. It was essentially a job of organization, and Lenin deployed his human forces shrewdly. By 1919 the leaders

became alarmed over the spread of corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency. A Commissariat of Workers' and Peasants' Inspection was set up to deal with these plagues, and Stalin was put in charge of it. He held this post until 1922, when he was designated Secretary General of the Communist Party, as the Bolshevik party had been re-christened. That is still technically his only important post.

None of these were jobs that called for the gifts he did not possess. They did not take him before the newly awakened masses of the country, but rather into the offices—and into the private lives—of other officials of the mushrooming party of power. The anonymous millions continued to ignore him. But the local officials in every city and town of Russia came to know him. More important, he learned to know them: the chinks in their moral armor, the measure of their appetite for advancement.

As Commissar of Nationalities, Stalin was brought into direct contact with the big and little bureaucrats of the country's endless minorities—Ukrainians, Tartars, Armenians, Georgians, Jews, White Russians, Volga Germans, Uzbeks, and so on. In the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection he became the arbiter on the seamiest side of the new order. All the mistakes, squabbles, corruptions in the trail of a great social upsurge came to his attention. He met thousands of communists in the lower strata, down in the muck of the revolution. Shrewdly he bound them to himself—because of what he knew about them, because of what he hid about them.

From the very first, and deliberately, he began to build a personal following, a machine within the machine, a party within the party. The provincial officials, excited by

their first taste of authority and often maddened with ambition for advancement, were dazzled and tongue-tied by the Trotskys and Lunacharskys and Bukharins. They had no fear of Stalin—at first. His position as secretary of the party, even before he made himself Secretary General, was an ideal spot for building that private machine. There were no precedents. Every man made what he could out of the job assigned to him.

Stalin made of the secretariat a sort of personnel bureau. While others were burdened with great affairs of state, while Zinoviev fussed and plotted and orated as president of the newly created Communist International, Stalin merely decided who should be designated as key man on this or that local committee, who should be put in charge of party affairs in Kharkov or Minsk, or even some third-rate town in Siberia or Central Asia. With every month, more of Stalin's own people—doers rather than talkers, hard-boiled, if not too intellectual; in short, people like himself—took over the functions of politics and government on the lower humdrum levels.

By the time the pyrotechnics of revolution had died down, Stalin's personal machine was in working order. There were not enough Old Bolsheviks to go around in running the entire political and economic and social life of a sixth part of the earth. New people, without allegiance to the glamorous pre-revolutionary past, had to be recruited and given authority. They were unsentimental about the underground past. Their chief allegiance was to the man who gave them that authority. If it was not Stalin, it was the political ward of someone raised from the mass by a Stalin henchman.

I am running far ahead of the story. But we must have this sense of the slow, continuous, relentless growth of Stalin's machine, even as we watch the thrilling and tragic events of the civil war years that followed the seizure of power. The very intensity of those events concealed Stalin's patient political handicraft. The leaders, like those who now read the history of the period, could not spare attention for anything beyond the turgid drama of the moment. What matter who appointed obscure comrades to head the Minsk or Omsk party committee?

Lenin was not optimistic on the chances of retaining power. He was overjoyed when his regime survived beyond the seventy days of the Paris Commune. He issued orders that monuments to the revolution be erected everywhere—the Bolsheviks should at least leave their mark before they fell.

Only a working class revolution in Europe, the Soviet leaders felt, could save them from extinction. "Russia has begun," said Lenin, "the Germans, the French and the English will complete the work, and socialism will conquer." And Trotsky agreed: "Either the Russian Revolution will bring about a revolutionary movement in Europe, or the European powers will crush the Russian revolution." Certainly they had no grounds for optimism. Their foreign enemies multiplied and Russian generals were leading armies against them from every point on the compass. Every department of life and government was being sabotaged by internal enemies. The enthusiasms of victory were degenerating into cynicism or despair as the fruits of victory proved sour and wormy. A bottomless poverty in men and materials seemed to doom the revolution, un-

less the reservoirs of Europe could be opened quickly.

A few of Lenin's associates protested privately. They were irked by this dependence on Europe. Their psychological horizons were cut off at the Russian frontiers, and though they could not logically defend their feelings, they thought "in Russian" and not "in European." Stalin was among these. We have power, let's hang on to it, whatever the rest of the world does—such was the essence of his attitude. More than any other feeling it differentiated the provincial Communists, ignorant of Western ideals and culture, from the Westernized, émigré leaders. Mystic faith in their own destiny outweighed logic.

Pesky problems swirled about the heads of the Bolsheviks like a fierce snow blizzard. From prison cells and stuffy foreign cafés they had been transported to dictatorial power, and must learn everything from the beginning. The population must be fed, industry restored; the armed attacks of the White and invading armies at all points of the compass must be fought off. For years the Soviet regime remained a complex of confusions and desperations in a vortex of calamities.

The great task was to hold on somehow with bleeding fingers to power, during four years when the armies of Kolchak, Denikin, Yudenich, Wrangel battered at the new government; when Czechoslovaks, British troops, French battleships, Japanese invaders harried the new rulers on all sides. And in carrying through this task, Trotsky became the supreme figure. Years before, in a Vienna garret, he had studied military tactics from books. Now the man of words, the journalist and the orator, was commander-in-chief in a war on a vast and shifting front.

Out of the scattered guerrilla fighters, out of the local militias, Trotsky forged an organized Red Army. His armored train, a headquarters on wheels, dashing from one front to another, provides one of the great melodramas of modern times. Brusque, commanding, even a bit theatrical, Trotsky became at once the idol and the scourge of his armies. Many a minor communist officer whom he might have won over to his side, the imperious disciplinarian in Trotsky drove into sullen antagonism.

I shall not pretend even to summarize the civil wars. The many volumes written about those crucial years have not quite compassed the complicated story. It was not one war, but a crazy puzzle of wars within wars. The pattern of Reds-against-Whites that remains in the world's memory is an illusion created by distance. Actually some of the ugliest fighting was between different brands of anti-Red forces. A few of the most difficult campaigns of the Red Army were against other Reds, such as the anarchist Makhno guerrillas in the Ukraine. Nationalist liberation movements clashed with social movements.

In fact, the ultimate triumph of the Soviet armies is due in large measure to the contradictions and confusions of its enemies. In the whirlpool of wars, Trotsky's Red Army, with all its faults, was a disciplined, organized machine compared to the others.

What of Stalin in the civil wars?

## XIII

### STALIN'S CIVIL WAR

THE HISTORY OF THE CIVIL WAR PERIOD, like every other phase of Soviet history, has been laboriously and shamelessly "revised" at Stalin's command since he came to power. Children at school are taught that Stalin organized and led the defense of the country against internal and foreign enemies; that he created the glorious Red Army. But adults remember—and the earlier written histories are available.

Special attention has been paid by the court clowns of Soviet history to foreshortening Stalin's role in the picture for two reasons. Not only must Stalin's figure be magnified by the trick photography, but no less important, Trotsky's figure must be reduced, distorted and blurred. The story of the Russian civil wars without Trotsky is a considerable improvement over the proverbial omelet without eggs, but it is the dish now being served to the entire country. His post-factum elimination from the story was gradual. In the first years of Stalin's political ascendancy, he was content merely to deny the "legend" that the War Lord had been the "only" and "main" architect of victory. He credited that victory to the abstract party. Said Stalin, five years after the wars:

"I must insist with all resoluteness that the high honor of bringing about our victories belongs not to individuals,



but to the great collective of the advanced workers of our country—the Russian Communist Party.”

Thereafter the falsification moved fast. From being neither main nor only leader, Trotsky was reduced in the Kremlin version to a sort of supernumerary without any asset qualities. Then he was converted into a liability. By this time any school child (especially a school child) in Moscow or Omsk, knows that the wars were won despite the blunders and disloyalties of Trotsky. Luckily for the revolution, Stalin—Lenin’s right-hand man!—was always there to correct the mistakes made by the commander-in-chief of the Red Army. Every adjective of glorification once applied to Trotsky the warrior has been expropriated for the special use of Stalin. In the whole record of political skulduggery on the upper levels of history there are few more amazing instances of deliberate and sustained fraud.

One sample of the methods of historical revision employed in Stalin’s domain will perhaps give the feel of the fraud. The Red Army had been badly beaten at Perm, and the enemy was advancing. Lenin wanted to send a strong man to try to save the pieces from the debacle. The official history now makes a great deal of the fact that Stalin was chosen for the task. Lenin’s telegram on the subject has been disseminated in millions of copies. The essential sentences, in the Stalinist version, read:

“There are several party dispatches from Perm concerning the catastrophic condition of the army and drunkenness. I thought of sending Stalin—am afraid Smilga would not be firm enough. . . .”

Actually the telegram had been addressed to Trotsky (a fact slurred over in the “new” history). Just before the

reference to Stalin it had also contained this: "*I am sending them on to you. You are asked to go there.*" And it had concluded with the request, "Telegraph your opinion." In short, what was in truth a telegram revealing complete reliance on Trotsky has been subjected to plastic surgery to make it look like supreme faith in Stalin!

For half a dozen years after the civil wars it did not occur to anyone to credit Stalin with military genius. Lenin dispatched him to a number of fronts, but always in a civilian capacity, as "trouble shooter." To Tsaritsyn, on the lower Volga, he went to organize grain collections; to Perm, to ascertain why the defense had broken down. Always, on these assignments, Stalin proved his competence as a hard-boiled executive. He "cleaned up" situations with the aid of firing squads. He also proved his skill as an organizer, pounding chaos into order with the butt of his revolver.

But beyond all else, Stalin, on these occasions, demonstrated his native capacity for complicated intrigue. The record of his missions on various sectors of the shifting front is a tangled skein of open and secret insubordination. It was the first major phase of his duel with Trotsky. On the surface it seemed then that Trotsky was completely triumphant. Only in retrospect it becomes clear that Stalin was really the victor. Under cover of the physical melodrama and emotional heroics of those desperate years Stalin had mined the ground under his beloved enemy. Trotsky emerged with all the showy credit. Stalin emerged with a following of devoted, embittered conspirators pledged in their hearts to avenge their mediocrity against the insult of Trotsky's greatness.

Trotsky was at the pinnacle of his glory in those wars. He was ubiquitous, imperious, ruthless. The man of books had been catapulted into the role of warrior, and proved himself a match for the place. Probably there had been no such war in all history. Certainly no civil war of this magnitude had ever taken place. The internal enemies were led by trained military men. The invading foreign armies were organized along orthodox lines. But the Soviet forces were, at the start, little more than a rabble. The old armies had melted away. But by the time the civil strife had ended, Trotsky had built a new Red Army of six millions.

His most extraordinary feat was this: that he provided his new armies with trained leadership. Boldly, and without underestimating the risk, he had dared *to use officers of the enemy* to lead his own raw forces. He took over tens of thousands of Czarist officers, from generals down, and put them in charge of his troops—though he knew that these officers hated the Bolsheviks. These were men who, for various reasons of patriotism or self-interest, had declared themselves ready to help the people's armies. To guard against treachery, Trotsky developed a system of "civilian commissars" paralleling the officers' corps. These were trusted communists, watching over the political morale of the military "specialist" and empowered to countermand orders. Here and there the system worked havoc. But on the whole, events justified Trotsky's experiment.

There were those who were honestly horrified by such reliance on "specialists." They dreaded the influx of the monarchist officers and ridiculed military science generally. In the romantic mood of a new revolution they preferred to rely on the rough-and-ready guerrilla spirit, under un-

trained but wholly devoted leaders. That division of opinion was reflected even in the highest circles of the Kremlin regime. The fact alone that Trotsky was made the supreme commander of all the forces is proof that Lenin approved, on the whole, the "scientific" rather than romantic approach to the problem. Yet he tolerated—and at points, it may be, encouraged—the other group. He was a master in the utilitarian arts of juggling men and ideas, extracting what he needed from each.

Stalin put himself at the head of those who opposed Trotsky's system of specialized leadership. The circumstance that it was Trotsky's plan probably made Stalin's opposition a conditioned reflex action. When Trotsky said A, Stalin could scarcely restrain himself from saying Z. In justice to the Caucasian, however, it should be recognized that distrust of the educated, the specialized, the scientific was in his nature. His deep suspiciousness would naturally be outraged by reliance on monarchist officers. His heritage of mountaineer logic would incline him to the blunt guerrilla tactics, rather than the cultivated strategies of trained men.

Such at any rate was the conflict of military principle between the War Lord and Stalin. Beyond that was their deepening mutual hatred. Again and again, in complaining against the insubordination of Stalin and Stalin's henchmen on this or that front, Trotsky would repeat, "After all, we must have military discipline!" Again and again he threatened actual arrest and court-martial proceedings against Stalin, Voroshilov, Rukhimovich, Mezhlauk and others, despite their eminence in the party. Often enough he ordered the shooting of highly-placed commu-

nists, despite the fact that their disobedience was in no sense counter-revolutionary.

It was Lenin, at his desk in the Kremlin, watching everything, holding all the strings in his small delicate hands, who restrained Trotsky's anger against the Stalin faction. Can it be that Lenin deliberately kept the anti-Trotsky group from being suppressed as a counterweight against the vehemence and imperiousness of the War Lord? The idea is not impossible. The boundless popularity of Trotsky among the masses, the vigor of his methods, were causing talk of "Bonapartism." Afterwards it became clear enough that Trotsky harbored no Napoleonic ambitions—if he had, there were times when he might readily have taken over control. But at the moment, under the tensions of a life-and-death struggle, Lenin may have considered Stalin and the Stalinist group as a sort of insurance against Bonapartism.

As a member of the highest party committees, Stalin considered himself responsible directly to Lenin and the Revolutionary War Council. He writhed every time he received orders from commander-in-chief Trotsky. And whenever possible, he disobeyed them flagrantly. Trotsky would demand obedience, threaten arrest, and in the end would obtain Lenin's support in recalling and disciplining Stalin. But meanwhile Stalin would have managed to make bad blood between Trotsky and local commanders. As he swallowed his humiliation and returned to Moscow after such an episode, Stalin knew that he had additional allies for some future settlement of accounts.

Tsaritsyn, "city of Czars," is now called Stalingrad, "city

of Stalin." When Stalin arrived there as Lenin's emissary, in July 1918, he found fantastic disorder. A former workman, Klementi Voroshilov, was in command of the Red Army there—the same Voroshilov who is now Stalin's Commissar of War. Stalin decided that before he could hope to gather grain from the peasants, he must clean up both the civilian and military situations. That region was therefore the first to feel the full brunt of his vigor and brutality. He organized a special Cheka division and prisons were soon jammed with victims. The one word "Shoot!" was his medicine for all complaints. Even a violently anti-Bolshevik witness who described this period wrote admiringly "that any of the old administrators have good cause to envy his energy."

Trotsky was making desperate efforts to whip the loose fighting remnants into a unified army. On the Tsaritsyn front he was stymied. First Voroshilov, and now Stalin, followed instructions only when they fitted in with their own ideas. On one of Trotsky's orders, still in existence, Stalin scrawled: "To be ignored." When Trotsky commanded the temporary evacuation of Tsaritsyn to prepare for an attack on the Czechs and Whites elsewhere, he was disobeyed. The result was a Red defeat at Simbirsk. Years later Marshal Tukhachevsky, then head of the War Academy in Moscow, estimated that this Tsaritsyn insubordination, by upsetting Trotsky's plans, prolonged the civil war by two years.

Trotsky was infuriated. He telegraphed to Lenin: "I insist categorically on Stalin's recall." Lenin complied and Stalin pretended to submit, but he was seething within and waiting for his hour of revenge. He continued in a thou-

sand subtle ways to encourage Voroshilov and other commanders in their defiance of Trotsky. Later Trotsky, looking back on the period, would write that Stalin "carefully picked up people with grievances." Earlier Bukharin had cited "implacable jealousy of anyone who knows more or does things better than himself" as one of Stalin's chief attributes. The confusions and desperations of a multitudinous war provided infinite goads and opportunities for this jealousy to express itself. Trotsky, from exile, would summarize: "Stalin was obviously sowing trouble. Not until much later did I realize how systematically he had been doing that—almost nothing but that." We must discount the judgment, considering its source. Yet the documentary record tends to support this harsh accusation.

There is no need, in this abbreviated biography, to follow in detail Stalin's many war assignments. Suffice that he made himself invaluable by his energy and ruthlessness, despite his acts of insubordination. At the climactic moment Stalin always yielded, even pretending contrition, only to return to his game at the first opportunity. In these years Stalin learned that numerically weak regimes could hold on by the simple process of destroying physically all actual or potential opposition. He learned the lessons of terror and was among its most brutal practitioners.

Due to Trotsky's insistence, Petrograd was not abandoned when the White Armies advanced on it. The city was saved and the Bolsheviks were jubilant. It was decided to present Trotsky with the Order of the Red Banner for his achievement. To everyone's astonishment, Kamenev proposed that Stalin should also be decorated. Michael Kalinin (now Stalin's puppet President) asked, "For what?

I can't understand why it should be awarded to Stalin." The shrewd Bukharin explained: "Can't you understand? This is Lenin's idea. Stalin can't live unless he has what someone else has. He will never forgive it." Lenin understood his subordinates.

His frequent brushes with the Central Committee and with the War Lord reveal that Stalin was beginning to measure himself against the top leaders. The period of meek submission and make-believe humility was drawing to a close. On one occasion he threatened resignation. The Central Committee rapped his knuckles and bruised his ego with the reply: "The Political Bureau regards the framing of your demands in the shape of ultimatums and resignations as impermissible." Another time, when he was ordered to the Caucasian front after the defeat of General Denikin, Stalin protested that he was overloaded with work. Lenin replied: "It is your business to hasten the dispatch of reinforcements from the Southwest front to the Caucasus front. You must help in all ways and not dispute as to whose business it is." There is something in Lenin's tone which suggests a reprimand to a sulking child, rather than an order to a forty-year old political leader. He was handling his "wonderful Georgian" in his own way.

Why was not Stalin "liquidated" for his continuous transgressions and intrigues? As has already been suggested, Lenin may have considered him useful as a foil for Trotsky during the wars. Also, Lenin had in common with Napoleon a weakness for someone good at one thing, even if he was hateful on other things. Napoleon complained that he should have shot Fouché and Talleyrand, who finally



encompassed his downfall. But he had been partial to the clever rogues, because they were geniuses in their roguery. Lenin, too, before his death would seek to eliminate Stalin, but too late to undo the mischief. Stalin would finally encompass the downfall of Lenin's revolution.

In their march against Warsaw, in 1920, the Bolsheviks made their worst military blunder. They were flushed with their victories over the Whites and the interventionists. Hypnotized by their own slogans, they believed that the advancing Red Army would be received by the Polish population with open arms. They were received instead with loaded arms. Stalin was the civilian commissar in charge of the Southwestern front, and much of the credit for the march of the Red Armies to the gates of Warsaw went to him. It was in this campaign that the celebrated exploits of the cavalry under the colorful half-literate sergeant, now Marshal, Budenny took place.

Lenin favored the attempt to capture Warsaw, and Stalin seconded the idea. Trotsky opposed it as a dangerous adventure. Lenin's view prevailed, as usual. The Red Army line was stretched out thin and unprotected on its flanks. Trotsky ordered the southern flank to concentrate in a given area, as part of a movement to consolidate the Red strength. It is known that Stalin, together with Voroshilov and Yegorov, ignored the order, and there are military historians who blame the Soviet failure upon this act of disobedience. Trotsky himself has charged that Stalin sacrificed Warsaw because he was eager to capture Lemberg "single-handedly" to enhance his own prestige.

Whatever the facts, Stalin was widely blamed. The campaign with which he was most closely identified, having

begun gloriously, ended in disaster. A hasty armistice was signed with Pilsudski, the Polish leader, and in 1921 an arbitrary frontier line was drawn. That line would be wiped out eighteen years later, in September 1939, when Stalin ordered the Red Army to march into Poland after it had been smashed by Hitler.

Stalin emerged from the military period hardened and matured. He had deepened his enmity with Trotsky and others of the Old Guard, but he had made himself the tacit leader of the aggrieved and disgruntled and envious. He was in the struggle for power in earnest and for long. Already, in his mind's eye, he saw the future in which he would annihilate all those who had ignored or opposed him in the civil war, and elevate the Voroshilovs and Budennys who had worked with him.

The civil war, in which lawlessness was the one law, gave Stalin exceptional opportunities for displaying his talents for violence, repression and cunning. He came out of the conflict a political figure of first rank, a man whose very defects made him dangerous to opponents. Two things above all others rankled in his memory. The heroic reputation of Trotsky and the defeat in Poland. Tens of thousands lives were to pay to slake his hatred of Trotsky. And eighteen years after the Polish calamity, he would slake his hatred of Poland by grabbing practically all the territory the Kremlin had been forced to relinquish to Pilsudski.

In 1919, during the interval between campaigns, Stalin married for the second time. He was nearly forty. His wife was under seventeen. He had known her father, the Russian workman Alliluyev, in their early Bolshevik days to-

gether in the Caucasus. He had known her mother, the Georgian girl whom Alliluyev married. In 1912 the Alliluyev family, like Stalin, were in St. Petersburg. Stalin often visited them, and patted the head of the ten-year old Nadezhda. Seven years later he married her.

Alliluyeva bore him two children. She was neither especially good looking nor especially bright, and she was meek and self-effacing in the ancient Caucasian manner. In short, she was the ideal wife for the Bolshevik *abrek*, who remained in his relations to women essentially oriental.

At the end of 1930, when I interviewed Stalin, I asked him about his wife and children: Yasha, the son of his first wife, and the young girl Svetlana and the boy Vassily by his second wife. Both he and Voroshilov, who was present, were tremendously amused that anyone should be interested in such intimate non-political matters. And in a sense they were right. Alliluyeva neither added nor detracted anything in Stalin's career. Not until she died suddenly, on November 9, 1932, did the country become aware of her existence.

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## XIV

### THE FIRST BUREAUCRAT

NOTWITHSTANDING THE MILITARY VICTORIES, the Soviet regime staggered under the weight of its troubles. The European revolutions which were to complement the Russian revolution failed to come off. Seven years of war and civil strife reduced all industry to a heap of ruins. Famine, the recurrent plague of Russia through the centuries, had attacked a huge area. The glamorous promises of the honeymoon months of the upheaval had shaken down into general misery, political oppression and deep discontents.

Force and yet more force were needed to maintain the new regime under such conditions. Government degenerated into a system of police edicts and arbitrary punitive measures. The Cheka, formed to combat the class enemies of the revolution, flourished as a monstrous machine of terror against the whole population, including honest revolutionists who dared hold views of their own. The peasants had the land, but the government seized the produce of the land.

Though the Bolsheviks had intended to postpone the introduction of economic socialism to an economically more healthy period, the exigencies of war and other disasters forced the government to take over. A bastard socialism, backed only by bayonets, developed and came to be

called "war communism." In truth it was little more than a confiscation of all goods by the state and their distribution, with brutal inefficiency, on a war-time rationing basis.

Early in 1921, just before the last of the civil wars had been wound up, the growing discontents came to a head. Anti-government riots were becoming more frequent in the peasant villages. The murder of lower officials became almost habitual. But the real explosion occurred, significantly, among the friends rather than the enemies of the Soviet regime.

Kronstadt, the fortress at the mouth of the Neva, just outside Petrograd, had become symbolic of the Bolshevik revolution. Sailors from Kronstadt had been among the most faithful supporters of Lenin and had taken a leading part in the actual insurrection and seizure of power. And now, in the spring of 1921, it was Kronstadt that rose almost as one man and demanded those freedoms which the Bolsheviks had promised them. Local communists, heroes of the wars, headed the "rebellion," if rebellion it could be called. They had no intention of fighting the government, but when the Kremlin sent troops against them, the Kronstadt workers and sailors took up arms. The first Red Army divisions sent against their Kronstadt comrades refused to shoot. They had to be "purged" and reorganized before they carried out the unpleasant order.

The Kronstadt uprising was drowned in blood. Thousands of the revolution's best sons were killed. To this day the bloody episode remains the most disreputable skeleton in the Bolshevik closets. Indeed, with every year it has become more rather than less important. Kronstadt stands as proof that the Soviet system devoured its own children

almost from the beginning. Such political cannibalism merely became more voracious as time went on. Stalin would simply carry to an insane extreme policies put into effect by Lenin, Trotsky and their associates of 1921.

The Kronstadt tragedy, coupled with lesser uprisings elsewhere, decided the Moscow leaders to abandon "war communism." In its place they decreed a New Economic Policy—generally referred to by its initials as the NEP—which was in effect a compromise between state and private control of economic life. While the government retained banking and various basic industries, small manufactures, distribution of goods, and agriculture were returned to a private or capitalist basis.

NEP in turn produced a society without precedent in history. Private enterprise, having been long starved, now overflowed all bounds. All the evils of capitalism seemed exaggerated and caricatured, as men grabbed wildly for profits, and lush speculation choked all avenues of life. Ordinarily economic advancement means social prestige and respectability. But in NEP Russia is meant a sort of outlaw condition. The Nepman or private traders and manufacturers might thrive financially and live spaciouly but they were despised, persecuted and in constant danger of suppression. It was against this paradoxical background—this desperate, embattled compromise between a caricatured capitalism and a vulgarized socialism—that we must view the career of Stalin in the next seven years.

Stalin would make of NEP a ladder to dictatorial power. Its moods of disillusionments, its grab-as-grab-can atmosphere suited the Georgian's plans. In government as in economics, private enterprise flourished. The NEP period

attested a release of the earlier idealistic tensions, and cynical careerism, frank self-interest, became its vital laws. Stalin used NEP to the limit for his personal political aggrandizement, and having used it, kicked it over without a look backward.

In political life as in everyday life, force had become the dominant note. When the tinsel of revolutionary enthusiasm peeled off, what remained was dog-eat-dog competition for jobs and privileges. Theoretically the dictatorial party should have been a sort of purified expression of the needs and interests of the broad masses. Actually it was just another party, with the old appetites for dominion rampant. Every city had its political "boss"—Gregory Zinoviev ruled in Petrograd, Leo Kamenev in Moscow. Rykov bossed economic life, Dzherzhinsky was sole master of the Cheka, Tomsky dictated the trade unions. Stalin had his one good hand firmly on the levers of his own machine-within-the-machine. Trotsky had the final word in running the great new army.

Only Lenin stood above them all. The old prophecies of the opponents of Bolshevism had come true—power was in the hands of one man, who was in the final analysis the whole government. Deliberately Lenin shared his power with the party he headed, and put himself under jurisdiction of its various committees. It did not occur to him to shoot or to exile those who disagreed, if their disagreement was honest. He argued with them, even connived against them, but above all sought to bring them into line and save them for the party. But problems were big, time was short, inner squabbles increasingly bitter. Whether he

wished it or not, he had to use his decisive moral authority to settle matters. Almost against his own wishes, he found himself a dictator. We now know from notes that came to light years after his death that he was himself deeply alarmed by the course of affairs.

The whole mechanism of the Soviet government, he wrote, is "borrowed from Czarism and barely touched by the Soviet world." The Soviet Constitution, he warned, would become a "scrap of paper, impotent to defend the races of Russia against these true Russians, chauvinist Great Russians, essentially cowardly and cruel, like the typical Russian bureaucrat." The last allusion was a direct slam at Stalin, in connection with events in Georgia, of which we shall have more to say.

The bureaucracy to which Lenin referred was, indeed, the most alarming phenomenon of the revolution. Always Russia had been the classic land of inefficiency and red tape in government. But time, at any rate, had produced a routine. Now the routine had broken down. There was not even the restraint of habit to confine the weedy luxuriance of bureaus, departments, useless officials, paper government. Tens of thousands of careerists flocked to the party in power; hundreds of thousands clogged the mechanism of government. Paper forms multiplied and practical work was bogged under the weight of formalism, nepotism, patronage.

It was to fight this plague of bureaucracy that Lenin had created the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection—"Rabkrin" was the popular designation—back in 1919. The hard-fisted Stalin had been put at the head of it. That was unquestionably one of Lenin's most disastrous errors of



judgment. His hope was to make Rabkrin an instrument against arbitrary officialdom—in a sense even an instrument of popular democracy. It would hear complaints, fight against petty dictators in thousands of new government offices.

But the whole idea was beyond the grasp of a mind like Stalin's. He made of the Rabkrin just another bureaucratic department, in many respects the most bureaucratic of them all. For the Caucasian *abrek* it was a superb chance to solidify his personal power. It was resentment against the futility of this Inspection that first turned Lenin against Stalin.

But the most serious breach between the present and future dictators occurred in connection with a struggle around Stalin's native land, Georgia. That country had established a democratic republic on the European model, with moderate socialists in control. It had held out against the Red Army. In 1921 it was reconquered—a first step in Soviet imperialism. Lenin was eager to treat the conquered area generously, as a proof to the outside world that the Soviets were different in the treatment of small nations. Local freedoms and a large measure of autonomy had been promised to Georgia.

To set up the new Soviet authority, Lenin selected two Georgians—Stalin and Ordzhonikidze—and a Pole, Dzherzhinsky. As members of minority races they could be expected to deal kindly with a non-Russian people. The three men, however, had their own idea of how to manage a recalcitrant area. They set up a local Cheka and instigated a terror in which hundreds were killed, thousands jailed, and even communists terrorized. It remained for a couple

of Georgians and a Pole to give the Caucasus a taste of Russian imperialism compared with which the old Czarist rule seemed liberal.

Stalin drove the local communist leaders of Georgia out of office and installed his own henchmen. Lenin was by this time ill. In an interval of recovery he learned the shocking details of the Georgian terror—from the communist Mdivani, whom Stalin would punish by death for this daring, fifteen years later. But Stalin was no longer as humble as in the past. Outwardly he still pretended to heed Lenin, but in his heart, perhaps, he counted himself already stronger than the Father of the Revolution. "Lenin," he may have thought, "merely has a halo, whereas I have a political machine." In any event, Stalin took Lenin's rebukes with small grace, and even indulged in a bit of irony against the revered leader.

Lenin, apparently for the first time, was frightened by the evil potentialities of his "wonderful Georgian." He called in Trotsky and told him frankly of his fears. Bureaucratism was strangling the revolution, and Stalin seemed the first bureaucrat among them all. Jokingly, and yet in deadly earnest, Lenin proposed to Trotsky a "bloc" against this evil, and Trotsky agreed that he was always ready to make a bloc with a good man. In effect it amounted to an agreement to work together against the first bureaucrat.

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## XV

### DISOWNED BY LENIN

IN MARCH, 1922, STALIN was designated Secretary General of the Central Committee of the ruling Communist Party, upon the motion of the Petrograd boss, Gregory Zinoviev. It was the most strategic position conceivable for an ambitious politician. Yet what appears in the perspective of time as the turning point in Russia's history went practically unnoticed at the time. Lenin was at the helm and the idea that anyone might supersede him seemed preposterous.

But two months later Lenin suffered a paralytic stroke. For twenty months he would be bed-ridden. His mind would remain crystal clear, his instinctive perceptions even heightened. In the midst of physical collapse he seemed possessed of a clairvoyant sense of the future, and was tortured by his forebodings of disaster for his revolution. Between paralytic strokes, his old energies would flare up. Those who had taken liberties with principles during his collapse would scurry for cover; his friends would rally around him; then he would relapse again into helplessness.

It was around Stalin that Lenin's forebodings now tended to cluster. The *abrek* was bolder, since it was against a stricken, bed-ridden, often literally dumb leader that he was now plotting. Having acquired the post of

Secretary General, he proceeded to exploit it to the limit. It was the one place where he could act effectively almost beyond the scrutiny of the other party chiefs, since he dealt with endless small problems, provincial matters, personnel questions on the lowest levels. These small things, Stalin knew, added up to the reality of control. By the time that Lenin and others became aware of what was happening, Stalin was stronger than they. Trotsky's interests and abilities were so far above the lowly political planes where Stalin operated that he could scarcely see that far below. Boris Souvarine, in his fine biography of Stalin, summed up the process:

"Stalin had begun a secret and unprecedented task in the Secretariat of the party. One by one he rearranged the personnel of the machine, on mysterious considerations known only to himself. . . . For a long time Stalin, the instrument of the machine, and the machine, the instrument of Stalin, were indistinguishable."

Lenin and Trotsky stood head and shoulders above the rest of the Bolshevik leaders. Below them the scramble for power took ever uglier and more obscene forms. After Lenin's paralysis, only Trotsky seemed to stand between the lesser leaders and the succession to Lenin's place. His very superiority drove the ambitious ones among the secondary leaders to join hands against him. The fact that he had become a Bolshevik, in name, only in 1917, gave them a self-righteous moral justification for "ganging up" on Trotsky. They could tell each other, indignantly, that he was an interloper—useful enough in the hour of crisis, but still an outsider.

The Russian masses, and even the rank-and-file com-

munists did not suspect the virulence and ruthlessness of the struggle on top. They heard the off-stage noises, and wondered at curious episodes even behind the footlights. But they were never taken into the confidence of the self-appointed "vanguard" of the masses.

Stalin had formed a political partnership with the Petrograd and Moscow bosses, Zinoviev and Kamenev. The waddling Zinoviev, obese, oily, nervous, with a shock of disheveled hair, was a most unprepossessing personality in close-up. He lied and schemed and ran to a neutral corner at the first sign of punishment. But he had captured the popular imagination notwithstanding, being a natural demagogue, his eloquence touched with hysteria. He was president of the Communist International. Kamenev, with his trim beard and well-washed look, seemed a gentle intellectual; his political skulduggery flowed from his weakness of character rather than natural wickedness.

This *troika* or triumvirate had in common only their opposition to Trotsky and their lack of principle in political combat. (Kamenev was Trotsky's brother-in-law, being married to Olga Trotsky, but this family relationship did nothing to dull the sharpness of the struggle.) Zinoviev, no doubt, felt sure that he was merely using the other two. He could discount Kamenev as a weakling, and Stalin as lacking any of the qualities of popular heroes. Zinoviev could not imagine that anyone unable to make a public speech, ignorant of socialist literature and disputation, unable to write a sizzling polemic pamphlet—in short, anyone like Stalin—could possibly take over the revolution. He was not astute enough to realize that the qualities needed to lead a revolution in the making

are not necessarily those needed to capture a revolution already made. Stalin was content to let Zinoviev imagine they were using him. He even encouraged them in this delusion.

As for Trotsky, for a long time he simply remained contemptuous of the *troika* maneuvering. "Too far-reaching in his self-confidence," the canny Lenin had written of him in a secret document. That contemptuous superiority suited the Georgian's purposes perfectly.

In a thousand ways, week after week, the triumvirate succeeded in isolating the still glamorous War Lord. They were preparing for the approaching day when Lenin would be no more. Everywhere their own creatures were substituted for officials suspected of too much love for Lenin or too much admiration for Trotsky. Known partisans of Trotsky found themselves suddenly assigned to urgent missions abroad, to get them out of the way. The attack was not yet open. That would wait until Lenin had departed this world.

The *troika*, having felt the political pulse of other leaders, temporarily enlarged itself into a tacit conspiracy of seven—again united only by their common envy or honest fear of Trotsky. Those added were Kalinin, Tomsy, Rykov and Kuibishev. Of the seven, only Stalin and Kalinin are still among the living as these words are written in 1940. All the others were used to the utmost by Stalin, then executed or hastened to their deaths.

The first to be alarmed, then horrified, by the political warfare was Lenin himself. Above all he sensed the danger of the enmity between the most important

and the least important members of the Political Bureau, Trotsky and Stalin. From his sick-bed he cautioned against the danger of a split, in a document written over a period of weeks and known to history as Lenin's *Testament*.

"Comrade Stalin," he wrote, "having become General Secretary, has concentrated an enormous power in his hands, and I am not sure that he always knows how to use that power with sufficient caution." Nor did he spare Trotsky. Attesting that the War Commissar was "the most able man in the present Central Committee," Lenin pointed out "his too far-reaching self-confidence." In the same vein he assayed the characters of other leaders. Apparently he hoped to dissolve antagonisms by uncovering the weaknesses, underscoring the virtues, of his successors.

Later, having brooded some more over the danger to his life's work, Lenin came to a decision. *Stalin must be removed!* He added these lines to the *Testament*:

"Stalin is too rude, and this fault, supportable in relations among us communists, becomes insupportable in the office of General Secretary. Therefore, I propose to the comrades to find a way to remove Stalin from that position and appoint to it another man who in all respects differs from Stalin only in superiority—namely, more patient, more loyal, more polite and more attentive to comrades, less capricious, etc. This circumstance may seem an insignificant trifle, but I think that from the point of view of the relation between Stalin and Trotsky which I discussed above, it is not a trifle, or it is such a trifle as may acquire a decisive significance."

This document was not destined to see the light un-

til many years after Lenin's death. Indeed, it was first published in English, in America, by Max Eastman.

It is now known that Lenin had intended to end Stalin politically with one blow. He had decided to use the Caucasian's activities in the Caucasus to disarm him forever. The blow was timed for the next congress of the party, in the spring of 1923. Lenin prepared an article on the "national question," in substance an attack on Stalin. He sent a copy to Trotsky, but Lenin's secretary cautioned Trotsky against showing the document to Kamenev. When asked why, he told Trotsky:

"Vladimir Ilyich (Lenin) says: 'Kamenev will immediately show everything to Stalin, and Stalin will make a rotten compromise and then deceive us.'"

Then the secretary added:

"Lenin does not trust Stalin, and wants to come out against him openly, before the entire party. He is preparing a bomb."

At the same time Lenin wrote an article attacking Stalin through his mismanagement of the Rabkrin, the Inspection. "Everybody knows," he wrote, "that a worse organized institution than this one does not exist, and that under the present conditions you can expect nothing whatever of this institution." It was a criticism which, a year or two earlier, would have been almost enough to end a commissar's career. Now Stalin was not perturbed. The paralytic could be humored and fooled. The Political Bureau, in which Stalin by this time had a majority of his own conspirators, decided not to publish it. Lenin was being censored! To console the invalid, Kuibishev even suggested the printing of one fake copy of



*Pravda* to show Lenin! Such were the depths of cynicism and chicanery to which the highest organ of the revolution had descended.

In the weeks before the congress, Lenin on several occasions indicated his determination to end Stalin's inflated power. In a note to Mdivani he wrote, "I am outraged at the rudeness of Ordzhonikidze and the connivance of Stalin and Dzherzhinsky." Infuriated by Stalin's rudeness to Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, the stricken leader dictated a letter in which he broke off all personal relations with Stalin. It was the last letter he ever wrote.

But the bomb prepared against Stalin never went off. Shortly before the congress opened, Lenin suffered his last stroke. Krupskaya, Trotsky and a few others who knew Lenin's intentions and had his *Testament* at their disposal, decided not to raise the issue. They still believed Lenin would recover and would do the job in his own way. It was probably Trotsky's fatal political error. Silence and concealment, too, suited Stalin's schemes perfectly.

The windings of the conspiracy to discredit and then to eliminate Trotsky are too devious to lend themselves to easy summation. For the purposes of this brief biography I must content myself with underlining the character of Stalin's methods.

The theory that the end justifies the means, basic in the thinking of Bolshevism, may be defended with some semblance of reason when the end in view is noble. Once accepted, however, it becomes a habit of behavior to achieve any ends, some of them far from noble. The

Stalins and Zinovievs were sustained in their bank robberies and political chicanery, later in their mass murder of "class enemies," by the righteousness of their cause. Now, after five or six years of power, the use of the most despicable methods to achieve their aims had become second nature.

They were using all means for ends they knew to be the opposite of righteous. The boundaries between right and wrong had been obliterated. Such ethical scruples as they may have possessed at the outset were lost in the shuffle. Lying, falsification of documents, imprisonment of inconvenient witnesses became routine. Tammany Hall at its lowest moral ebbs seems a high-minded and sportsmanlike organization compared with the abysmal cynicism and moral violence of the Bolshevik higher-ups who ganged up on Trotsky.

The triumvirate and its four associates were not yet ready to dispense with him altogether. He was still the idol of the masses. He was still the master of the Red Army—there was always the danger that he might suddenly swing this weapon against his detractors. It would be better to keep him among the mighty for his prestige and abilities. But his wings must be clipped. His reputation must be nibbled away. And this is precisely what they did.

Past "errors" of Trotsky were dug up from the morgues of time and artificially inflated into current problems. His pre-1917 opposition to Lenin and Bolshevism were disinterred. His latest articles on matters of policy were deliberately distorted by commentators subservient to Stalin and his fellow-conspirators. Even before Lenin died,

the War Lord's authority had been sufficiently undermined to make his succession impossible. Stalin's associates counted on dividing the succession among themselves. They counted without Stalin.

Trotsky did not fight back. To do so effectively he would have been obliged to go over the heads of the party committees, perhaps over the head of the whole party, to the Russian masses. This he would not do. Having forgotten his own earlier strictures against Bolshevik centralization, he now failed to take the lower ranks of the ruling party and the Russian people as a whole into his confidence. He continued to regard the situation as an "inner party affair." A lying semblance of "party unity" must be maintained to fool the simple ones down below. Under such rules the most adroit and unscrupulous players had the edge. By subscribing to the notion that a ruling group is something apart from those whom it rules, Trotsky in effect had lost before he began playing the game.

Lenin died on January 21, 1924. Trotsky was ill at the time, and was on his way to a sanatorium in the Caucasus. He learned the sad news in a telegram—from Stalin.

## XVI

### STALIN INVENTS A GOD

WE COME NOW TO JOSEPH STALIN'S greatest stroke. Nothing before or after compares in astuteness with what he did in the days and months immediately after Lenin's death. In effect, he took a social movement and turned it into a religious sect. He took a collection of living ideas and turned them into fixed sacred texts. Thereafter the actions of those in control of the Leninist "church" would be infallible, and doubt would be a crime. By changing Bolshevism into a compulsory faith, any questioning became heresy, to be dealt with by the G.P.U. inquisitors.

To achieve this, Stalin created a god—and a devil. The god, of course, was Lenin, the devil Trotsky. Others fell in with the move. It was in the tradition of the country, where sects and cults of the wildest kind had always flourished. But the cold, calculating mind behind it all was Stalin's.

Lenin alive was a menace to Stalin. Had he survived, he would have eliminated the Caucasian Caliban—or been eliminated by him. For three years, since the end of the wars, Stalin had carefully mined the ground under the Father of Bolshevism. Like Trotsky, Lenin was enmeshed in nets of intrigue. Flattered to his face, his work was undone behind his back by the new "tough" specimens with whom Stalin had filled the party apparatus. He was

preparing for a show-down with Stalin when death intervened.

But Lenin dead was no longer a menace. On the contrary, he became a useful stage property. Ironically, the man with whom he had broken personal relations, whom he was ready to disown—whose removal he had asked for in his last *Testament*—captured Lenin's corpse, Lenin's prestige, Lenin's words, and used them to his own advantage. By deifying Lenin, Stalin made himself the mouthpiece of deity. To contradict him, even to question his most absurd lies about simple facts, would soon become blasphemous and therefore punishable even unto the death penalty.

Lenin had been extremely modest in his personal life and habits. Alive, he had restrained his disciples and hangers-on whenever they tried to glorify him. Now his body and his memory were subjected to forms of worship that would have sickened him. Hundreds of places and institutions were named after him. Petrograd became Leningrad. Millions of "icons" of him—plaster-of-Paris busts, lithographs, monuments, paintings, photos—were spread through the country.

Most detestable of all, to those who were still true to the original spirit of the revolution, Lenin's corpse was mummified and put on display in a modernistic mausoleum on Red Square. Here year after year simple peasants and workers would file by. Many would cross themselves. The man who had hoped to make them think, was now being misused to stop them from thinking. Theirs was to believe in the absolute and eternal correctness of

Lenin and those who had usurped the power to speak in his name.

The rotted bodies of sainted Christian martyrs had been dug up and put gruesomely on display at the Anti-religious Museum a few blocks from Red Square: to disprove the superstition that saints do not rot. But here, in the mausoleum, was a new "saint," a scientific saint, whose body really remained intact.

The real sorrow that swept through the country helped Stalin and his henchmen to put over the new religion. Lenin's widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya, tried to protest. "Do not let your sorrow for Ilyich (Lenin) find expression in outward veneration of his personality," she pleaded. "Do not raise monuments to him, or palaces to his name, do not organize pompous ceremonies to his memory. . . . In his lifetime he took so little account of that kind of thing, which distressed him."

Her voice was drowned out in the hymns of praise and the multiplication of monuments. Stalin struck the keynote in a funeral oration in which he invented Six Commandments, part of which I have already quoted. Having deified Lenin, his followers therefore became "the anointed." In the same oration Stalin declared:

"We Communists are people of a special type. We are carved out of special matter."

At last he was able to throw logic to the winds, and rely on blind and mystic faith—backed by police action against skeptics.

Bolshevism was no more, in truth. In its place was "Leninism," something about which Lenin himself never

dreamed. Every word he wrote, including casual notes on scrap paper, became holy. Since Lenin was exceedingly human, he had changed his mind and admitted mistakes over and over again. Many of these words were necessarily contradictory. So much the better, as far as the Stalin ring was concerned. They could now pick the quotation, the annotation, that suited them at a particular moment, and enforce their plans with the appearance of Lenin's authority. They could, for example, cite Lenin at length against rapid industrialization of Russia when it was urged by Trotsky, and bolster their own even more rapid industrialization with citations from the embalmed leader.

It is fruitless to investigate whether Trotsky was the "natural heir" to Lenin. Revolutions do not move in straight, logical, "natural" grooves. They have their climactic moments and their reactions. The fevers of enthusiasm burn out, the spirit droops and the physical energies of a movement are sapped. The leader best able, or best suited by his own nature, to exploit the reaction takes over. Stalin took over. He was able to sharpen the mystic character of Bolshevism, to blur its rational character. He emptied Bolshevism of the last vestiges of its European spirit. What remained was more consistent with the backward, superstitious, fear-ridden country inherited from the Czars and conditioned by centuries of Asiatic despotism, agrarian feudalism, cultural immaturity. Stalin, to put the idea crudely, was avenging Rasputin.

At the very beginning of the Revolution, Maxim Gorky, the great Russian novelist, expressed his prophetic vision of this very change: "The revolution has overthrown the

monarchy," he asserted. "But perhaps it has only forced the external malady deeper into the organism." Then, when wholesale slaughter became the order of the day, Gorky wrote angrily:

"Evidently killing is easier than persuasion and this very simple method is very easy for people who have been brought up amongst massacres and educated by massacres. All you Russians are still savages, corrupted by your former masters, you in whom they infused their terrible defects and their insensate despotism."

No one was more aware of the essential beauty of the Russian character under the age-old layers of harsh experience than Gorky, who had so often depicted Russian capacity for affection and sacrifice. It was his great sorrow for the fate of his country that broke through in such bitterness. But his forebodings came true in Stalin. Gorky himself, as a sick and tired old man, succumbed to them. In his last years he was to become Stalin's man and to die pathetically in the midst of ugly palace intrigues.

The fires of revolution having died down, it was inevitable that someone of Stalin's type should inherit Lenin's mantle, whether the succession was theoretically "natural" or not. The country was hungry, wretched, dizzy with words it didn't understand. Now came one who spoke a language they could grasp, their old old mother tongue—the language of arrests, executions, wholesale exiles, prison camps. For a long time the new officials and many of the early ones had been annoyed with the fine-blown theorizing and "cultured" pretensions of the "Europeans." Now they could show their annoyance openly. Pretend-



ing to defend the teachings of the embalmed émigré Lenin, they now reviled his fellow-émigrés who were the living embodiment of those teachings. The former émigrés were a handful of aging veterans. The new bureaucrats were a legion of ambitious and relentlessly energetic young men determined to make brilliant careers for themselves in the name of the new slogans.

Besides, the country was weary unto death of those futile dreams of world revolution. Let humanity save itself, frayed nerves counseled, while we settle down to enjoy some of the fruits of our victory here in Russia. Stalin and his personal machine captured the regime by cunning politicians' tricks. But the tricks worked like magic because everywhere they found eager helpers: men and women from the dregs of society who were intoxicated by their new power and anxious to increase and relish it. They accepted the dry bones of Lenin's faith, but never even suspected that it contained an idealistic spirit.

I do not subscribe to the notion that any one man or a dozen men can make or break history. Mussolini was able to take Italy because the country was on the rocks economically and hopelessly bogged politically. It was prepared for a Mussolini. The reasons for Hitler's accession to power must be sought not only in his own character, but in German realities from Versailles down.

And Stalin, similarly, became master of Russia not merely because he was coarse, brutal and endlessly crafty. These things could put him in control because Russia was aching in all its limbs after so many years of foreign and civil war. It was violently in revulsion against the fine ideals which had brought so much suffering. It yearned

to creep back into its own familiar shell, its old ways and traditions. In short, the reason for Stalin's triumph after Lenin's death are to be found not alone in the nature of Stalin but in the nature of Russia.

Obviously it would be easier to over-simplify the picture and show Stalin, the revolutionary racketeer, "muscling in" on the idealists. The chances are that if it had not been Stalin another of his general type would have taken over.

From the beginning of its known history Russia has been divided in its soul. The country, sprawled across Europe and Asia, belonged to both and to neither, though the Asiatic elements were strongest in its make-up. Always there was a tug-of-war between the Slavophiles, deeply Russian, and the Westernizers, who yearned to become Europeans. This inner struggle showed up in its politics: periods of meddling in Europe followed by periods of withdrawal and isolation. It can be traced in Russian literature, with such Slavophile writers as Dostoievsky on one side and the polished Europeanized Turgenev on the other.

Often, indeed, Russia was most Asiatic when it tried hardest to become European. Peter the Great wished to Westernize and industrialize the country, like the Bolsheviks after him. But the methods he chose were profoundly Asiatic. He did not succeed in Westernizing Russia, but only in torturing it and brutalizing it further. Some of Stalin's own historians have called Peter the first Bolshevik, and the parallel with Stalin's course is all too obvious. At this writing, in fact, Stalin is striving to obtain the very "windows on Europe" in the Baltic and Black Seas

which obsessed Peter throughout his reign.

In any case, the events of 1917 and after catapulted Russia into world affairs. It became the vanguard of an expected world upheaval. But the old tussle reasserted itself: an unbearable tension between Asia and Europe. The slogans were new, the substance under the slogans the same. Trotsky against Stalin—world revolution against “socialism in one country.” The emotions behind this elementary division were the old familiar ones. Once more it was Westernizers against Slavophiles.

Stalin personified something far beyond himself, something reaching back into Russian history. When he conquered Trotsky it represented in a deep sense the victory of Asia over Europe, Ivan the Terrible over Karl Marx, Slavic mysticism and fatalism over European humanism. Lenin had within himself both elements. Now the elements fell apart, and Stalin rather than Trotsky was perhaps in this larger historical view the “natural” successor.

Communism in the years after Lenin was gradually purged of its non-Russian ingredients. It emerged as “national communism”—the exact parallel in many ways for the “national socialism” that was already gaining headway in Germany under the messianic drive of Adolf Hitler. Both formulas, of course, were misnomers, since socialism and communism in the Marxian sense are *international*. The emergence in Russia, moreover, was not immediately admitted by Stalin and his spokesmen. They held on to internationalist phrases and trade-marks while their thinking and policies became more deeply tinged with nationalist motivations. Stalin argued warmly then,

more tepidly since, that his national communism is not at variance with fundamental internationalism.

For honest communists outside Russia, the turn spelled tragedy. Having started out as sincere internationalists, they now found themselves nothing more than appendages of a Russian national cult. The Third or Communist International—Comintern is the usual abbreviated name—had become a world force. Millions with real grievances entered its ranks.

With Stalin in control, those foreign communist leaders who would not accept the new nationalistic version were simply kicked out of the Comintern. Only those willing to take Stalin and the movement on faith, ready always to change their beliefs at a signal from the Kremlin, could remain. In most countries a majority of the membership was eliminated. What remained was to become increasingly an extension of the Russian regime abroad, big or small agencies of the Kremlin.

The invention of Leninism was Stalin's master-stroke as a practical politician. From this point forward the story of the rise of Stalin is the story of the decline of the revolution in its original sense.

Lenin's real friends had connived in concealing the "domestic" squabbles from the Russian people. How were these people, whether inside or outside the ruling party, to guess that Stalin's and Zinoviev's hyperbolic tributes to Lenin were an obscene mockery? How were they to suspect that under the praise was a prayer of thanks to the fates which had removed Lenin at the "proper" moment?

Now Trotsky tried to tell the truth at last. But few

would believe him. The machine could not as yet prevent him from publishing books and articles. It could prevent their distribution, and it could distort their meanings. Every attempt of Trotsky to expose and to argue was met with some demagogic trick. Lenin in the years of his illness had turned against Stalin, Trotsky's friends whispered. Stalin did not argue. A picture showing Lenin and Stalin sitting close together on a bench suddenly appeared in the press, on picture postcards, in lithographs, in paintings. Millions of copies of this retouched photograph covered the country. It became obligatory equipment, almost, for every official who valued his job.

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## XVII

### TROTSKY IS DEFEATED

HAVING MADE A GOD OF LENIN, it only remained to make a demon of Trotsky. This was a slower and more difficult process. But Stalin succeeded supremely. In retrospect, his methods deserve the admiration of connoisseurs of skulduggery. Stalin's are the tawdry talents of the ward politician raised to the dimension of near-genius. He out-generaled the brainy ones, especially his temporary allies, and where generalship was not enough, he used strong-arm tactics. By this time the gigantic secret police organization—the Cheka, later called the G.P.U.—was staffed by his henchmen.

Terror was no Stalinist invention. It had been the way of government in Russia always. It was at the core of Bolshevism. Lenin used terror as coolly as an engineer uses water-power or electricity—sparingly and without hatred, simply as a driving force to get things done. Stalin now used it extravagantly, with an artist's relish for his métier. In following the unholy scramble for leadership after Lenin, we must never lose the awareness of the vast and continuous terror against the whole population and against the communists themselves. However the picture changes, this background of midnight raids, mass arrests, wholesale banishment remains constant.

Two features of Stalin's strategy need to be noted. They

are the marks of the man. We have seen them born in Gori and nurtured in Tiflis. The world would see them take shape on a universal scale in the European crisis of 1939-1940.

The first is Stalin's amazing *patience*, his careful nerveless restraint. There is that slow-motion quality about his plans that leaves his more high-strung and temperamental opponents helpless. He had built his personal machine of patronage so cautiously that it took years for Lenin and his associates to realize what had happened. And now he did not rush to finish off Trotsky. On the contrary, he even "protected" his adversary against hotheads. He had no intention of making a martyr of the glamorous War Lord, who was still idolized by the masses, especially the student youth.

He had no intention, in particular, of taking the remotest risk of failure. Instead he inflamed fear and envy of the man. He administered the poison of slander in strong doses but never strong enough to be fatal. Another in Stalin's place might have attempted to end Trotsky with one blow—which is precisely what the other two "triumvirs," Zinoviev and Kamenev, wanted to do. Not Stalin. He weakened his appointed victim with tantalizing slowness over a period of years, until he was ready for the "kill." Stalin never minded waiting ten or twenty years for his "sweet revenge."

The second feature of his procedure is equally characteristic. Stalin *let others do the dirty work*. One thinks back inevitably to those Caucasian days when others risked their necks in bank robberies and Djugashvilli-Koba pocketed the political credit. Now his attacks on Trotsky were

mild compared to those of his fellow-conspirators. Again and again he even interceded for Trotsky against his detractors, sticking a few more daggers in the lion's hide while doing it. He encouraged Gregory Zinoviev to take the lead in tearing down Trotsky's record. Having been constantly by Lenin's side in the émigré period, Zinoviev had the details of long-buried controversies at his fingertips. He exhumed those polemics for Stalin, digging his own political grave in the process.

There is evidence to show that Zinoviev and Kamenev had played with the idea of an "accidental" death for Trotsky, which could be blamed upon some counter-revolutionary assassin. Stalin would have none of it. When his fellow-triumvirs proposed to expel Trotsky from the highest committees of the party, Stalin publicly and demonstratively came to Trotsky's rescue.

Several years thereafter, when he was locking horns with his recalcitrant fellow-triumvirs, he actually reproached them with their lack of tolerance! Stalin's picture of himself restraining Zinoviev and Kamenev, in the role of tolerant conciliator, is a rare morsel of satire. But he did not smile, except inwardly, as he recalled how the others had tried to throw Trotsky out of the Political Bureau:

"We were in the majority on the Central Committee," he said, "and were content to remove Comrade Trotsky from his position as People's Commissar for War. We did not agree with Comrades Zinoviev and Kamenev, for we knew that the policy of lopping off might entail great dangers for the party. The method of blood-letting (it was blood-letting they wanted) is dangerous and infectious. Today you lop off one limb; tomorrow another; the day



after tomorrow a third—and what is left of the party?"

How strange and how prophetic those words would sound a decade later, when the lopping-off process had turned into the fiercest kind of butchery, with Stalin wielding the butcher knife!

But while "protecting" Trotsky, Stalin saw to it that the War Commissariat should be gradually infiltrated with his own people, many of them drawn from the Cheka. Trotsky in time became a stranger, a minority of one, in the ministry that he ostensibly headed. His resignation was inevitable.

Ambitious little careerists discovered soon enough that the quickest road to a job and influence was to "disagree" unpleasantly with the popular hero. Tens of thousands of scribblers and self-seeking nobodies were soon nibbling at Trotsky's reputation. His past disagreements with Lenin—forgotten and forgiven by Lenin himself—were dug up from the cemeteries of time. His every word was twisted and ridiculed. The label "Trotskyism" was stuck on everything that people liked least, and made to mean the reverse of "Leninism." No one quite knew what Trotskyism was; certainly not Trotsky himself. But everybody knew that it was something demoniacal, and worse—dangerous, if you cared to hold on to your livelihood.

The details of the process of character assassination would take us too far afield. A few examples must suffice. Trotsky in the introduction to a book sensibly warned against a monopoly of power or influence by the "Old Guard" of the party. New, youthful blood must be pumped into the veins of a living movement, he argued, or it would stagnate and rot. He cited examples of other

movements which had been made impotent because the resiliency of youth was not in them.

Instantly this theme was twisted out of shape in thousands of articles and speeches, hundreds of thousands of allusions. Trotsky was accused of setting the young against the old, of wishing to expel the founders of the Soviet Union and become a Bonaparte. His original words were forgotten in the shuffle. They were reduced to a handful of crippled excerpts tending to consolidate the "Old Guard" against the "Bonapartist" threat by Trotsky. "Unanimous" resolutions were passed at party meetings throughout the country denouncing the Trotsky book as a bid for Napoleonic power, though those at the meetings had never seen the book in question. Trotsky's protests were not even heard in the uproar of the attack.

Thinking in terms of major policy beyond Stalin's mental horizons, Trotsky constantly warned against the growing economic weight of the "capitalist" elements in the Soviet Union—the Nepmen, the richer peasants or "kulaks," the flourishing middle classes in the cities. This was advertised in every newspaper, in every speech and resolution as Trotsky's attempt to fight the peasantry and to lead the country into premature and Utopian socialist adventures.

The immense influence of the economically more comfortable elements in city and country alike was thus mobilized against Trotsky. The controlling group in the Soviet government, with all its faults, seemed to the "capitalist" sectors of the population a barrier against the extremism of the "real" Bolsheviks of Trotsky's stamp. Their support of Stalin was valuable, since they controlled myriad

jobs and had their spokesmen on all newspapers, in all offices and institutions. Only a few years later would they realize that they had been building up a terrible Frankenstein monster.

Inside as well as outside Russia, Trotsky seemed the apostle of extreme Leftism. Under psychological duress to live down his non-Bolshevik past, he was ever inclined to be "harder," more Bolshevik than others. This political over-compensation, useful in the first revolutionary years, ran counter to the prevailing mood of the nation and played into the hands of Stalin's group. By contrast with Trotsky, Stalin seemed the level-headed leader of moderation and "common sense." In the conduct of international communism, too, Stalin and his associates catered to the more moderate radicals. They began a period of appeasement of Social Democrats everywhere. They cooperated with certain Labor Party groups in England. Most important, they plunged into whole-hearted support of the non-communist Kuomintang movement in China under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek.

Trotsky thundered against this "opportunist" and "anti-proletarian" behavior, but no one any longer heeded his thunderbolts. He demanded "democracy" within the Communist Party, as against the centralized control instituted by Stalin. In particular he inveighed against the system of appointment of local secretaries by the center—the system, that is, on which Stalin's control rested. His detractors thereupon charged him with aiming to wreck the "unity" of the party, in order that he might put a Napoleonic crown on his own head.

Ultimately, of course, having disposed of Trotsky, Stalin

would out-Left everything his opponent had stood for, except in the matter of "party democracy." Stalin would not merely warn against the Old Guard but would exterminate them physically almost to the last man. Until then, the Old Guard was a potent weapon against Trotsky.

Trotsky and others were declaiming against the growing power of officialdom. The ruling party, they said, was moving ever farther away from the working masses. Secretary General Stalin grinned through his shaggy mustache. It was exactly the opening he needed. Until then the party had been kept small and exclusive. It was an organization of picked, tested men. Now he opened wide the doors to membership and some two hundred thousand poured into the ruling party.

Who were the new recruits? They were men and women who had stood aside from the revolution, perhaps even opposed it, but now swarmed into its safe and secure precincts. More important, they were simple, coarse and automatically distrustful of the "intelligentsia." By watering the party with these masses, Stalin depressed its mental level, and thereby widened the distance between the Trotsky type of Bolshevik and the rank-and-file communists. He made it a party closer to his own model.

After a while, as was to be expected, Zinoviev and Kamenev became worried about their own safety. They realized that Stalin, while pretending to be no more than one of the trio, was beginning to undermine them in a thousand devious ways. They had served his purpose and could be discarded—again on a slow-motion schedule. From among the disgruntled leaders the Secretary Gen-

eral had picked new tools. Alexei Rykov, the stunted, gargoyle-like veteran of Siberian exiles—brilliant, zealous, temperamental—had succeeded Lenin as head of the Council of Commissars or “Premier.” Nikolai Bukharin, the most erudite of Marxist theorists, was available. The head of the trade unions, Mihkail Tomskey, had a grievance against Trotsky because the latter had sought to have the state absorb the unions (it remained for Stalin to do this many years later).

These and others gravitated to Stalin, and almost imperceptibly they coalesced into a new cabal, directed now against Zinoviev and Kamenev no less than Trotsky. Stalin played one group against the other, even to the point of sometimes acting out the role of conciliator. The Leningrad and Moscow city bosses had sneered at Trotsky’s talk of party democracy. Now they, too, discovered the virtues of giving more voice to the rank-and-file. They, too, recognized the dangers to the socialist ideals in Stalin’s friendly treatment of the “kulaks” and the city Nepmen. Most important, having helped Stalin elaborate his thesis of “socialism in one country,” they now found out that it was heretical after all.

In short, Zinoviev and Kamenev had become scared of Stalin and were acting to unseat him. Unlike Trotsky, they had political machines of their own. They came to the party convention of 1925 prepared to use their machine against the Georgian. But Stalin had no fears. The convention was completely packed with his own hand-picked delegates. These would not even listen politely to yesterday’s “triumvirs.” The Moscow and Leningrad contingents were swamped. Stalin’s long and patient sowing

in the provinces had produced its crop.

He would have had no trouble ending the two men right there and then. But once more he postponed the "kill." He could afford to wait. He permitted Zinoviev and Kamenev to remain on the Political Bureau. But he was now in a position to steal their local machines. His own henchmen by the hundreds displaced the incumbents in Moscow and Leningrad jobs. The national machine absorbed the local ones.

→ Stalin was neither surprised nor upset when Trotsky was joined by the men who had wanted to assassinate him. He had his enemies in one corral, which was as well. Kamenev himself had acted as go-between in patching up the differences between brother-in-law Trotsky and Gregory Zinoviev. Other anti-Stalin groups were drawn into the coalition. By 1926 there was a full-fledged "united Opposition." On the surface it seemed formidable, since it had well-nigh a monopoly of the party's venerated names and finest minds. The Opposition had all the brains. Stalin had nothing on his side but the police and the jobs. Stalin's victory was a foregone conclusion.

In June 1926 the Opposition agreed on a program. It called for industrialization. Trotsky had actually drawn up a Five Year Plan for turning the backward peasant land into a modern industrialized nation. Stalin made fun of the Plan as insane Utopianism, though a few years later he was to put forward his own Five Year Plan on a vastly more pretentious basis. The Opposition program also demanded more democratic conduct of the party and government. In the domain of theory, it argued against the notion of socialism in one country.

Once again this thunder fell on deaf ears at the party conference. It wasn't argued; it was simply booed.

The two years of struggle between Stalin and his new allies on one side and the anti-Stalin coalition on the other had its ups and downs. There were tense moments when the *abrek* seemed in real danger. But in the end he downed them all: or rather, he used others to down them.

→ Trotsky was forced to resign as War Commissar in January, 1925. But he remained in the party and its higher organs of power. On November 7, 1927, the tenth anniversary of the revolution, Trotsky, Zinoviev and other Oppositionists made a last desperate stand. Trotsky even tried to stage a one-man demonstration from the balcony of what is now the National Hotel in Moscow. He was yanked back into the room by G.P.U. agents. The last stand was a fiasco.

The rest was a mopping-up action. Trotsky, and the Old Bolsheviks who had helped Stalin defeat Trotsky, were exiled to Siberia along with some 75 other ranking leaders and thousands of lesser communists. It had taken Stalin exactly ten years to achieve single control. There were still a few around who imagined they shared the power. Their turn would come quickly enough. Like the Caucasian in the legend, Stalin had waited ten years at the strategic corner. Now the job was done—the dagger of revenge was neatly between the shoulder blades of the whole self-important, self-righteous group of intellectuals who had discounted or ignored the mountain *abrek*.

The millionfold masses of Russia had only confused inklings of the titantic tussle for power at the top. They

heard the noises and watched reputations fall, without understanding or caring. Life was so hard for them that the search for food absorbed all their energies. Living was so dangerous that merely to stay out of prison or concentration camp was victory.

In the Russian opera *Boris Gudonov* there are magnificent scenes where the mob is heard off-stage. It is a bewildered murmur and has no real effect on the action on the stage itself. Even thus, the Russian people had no real relation to the action on the stage of Bolshevik politics. There had been the great moment of liberation and revolution, a few years of romantic delusions of popular strength. Now the ancient pattern was clamped on the country again. Instead of a Czar, a Leader. But otherwise the old poverty, the old fears, the old terror.

Repeatedly I was to hear simple Russians speak of their *novyie bary*—new masters. Stalin was as far away from them, as divinely strong and awe-inspiring, as any Czar.

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## XVIII

### STALIN BECOMES “THE PARTY”

MEN BEARING HALOED NAMES, names crusted with revolutionary legend, were picked up by the police like so many common criminals and shipped out to remote Siberian exiles. Many of the victims were still glorified in the sacred books of Bolshevism—the process of erasure had not yet caught up with them. There were still cities, streets, factories named after the “culprits.” A few of the deportees still had their portraits in places of honor on official Soviet walls. Thereafter communists, no matter how exalted in the past, knew that disagreement with Stalin would be called treason to “the party.” Expulsion from its ranks would mean not simply political disgrace but prison, exile, persecution of their relatives and friends. It would make them hunted outlaws.

The remarkable fact, however, is that the Russian people were not scandalized. The final proof that the dictatorship under Stalin had cut the umbilical cord that once tied it to the masses is that these masses accepted the humbling of their whilom gods most placidly. They did not protest against the arrests of their national heroes. The strange goings-on in the uppermost circles touched popular curiosity, of course. They made people wonder uneasily, too, whether their own lives—particularly their

dwindling food allotments—might be affected. But the whole titanic struggle did not concern them intimately, precisely because it was among the titans.

I arrived in Moscow for the first time about three weeks after Trotsky and hundreds of his associates had been banished. The foreign colony of diplomats and correspondents was excited by the developments on high. Government functionaries and others who had a "professional" interest in events were agitated, though discreetly silent. I did meet a few younger men, party members, who discreetly conveyed their sense of despair. "The revolution is over—the counter-revolution is on us," one of them whispered gloomily. But these were exceptions. Ordinary Russians were calm and a bit bored. These were amazing events, but limited to the new aristocrats of the regime and of no interest to the plebeians.

Notwithstanding socialist and populist slogans, the distance between the people and their rulers was as large as it had ever been in the past. The fact that so many of the new sovereigns were recently sprung from the gray mass down below did not contract the distance. The newly-powerful, like the newly-rich, are likely to exaggerate the faults of their new station without possessing any compensating graces or virtues.

The vanquished communists, like the victors, subscribed to the same mystic faith in "the party." They stuck by that faith though the party had been captured by men whom they regarded as intellectually bankrupt and morally corrupt. The party could do no wrong even if its leaders could do no right. And it was that semi-religious conception of the party and its unity which enabled Stalin

to win out against men a hundred times his superior in everything but the arts of chicanery.

In essence this conception was (and remains) a swindle, with the masses as the victims. Ostensibly the party speaks in the name of the workers, but the workers must know nothing of what transpires within its aristocratic precincts. Their function is to applaud and to obey. Since the issue could not be carried to the people—since the people, indeed must be kept ignorant of the corruption in order to save face for the Bolshevik “church”—the most conscienceless of the priesthood had the upper hand.

Even after being humiliated and excommunicated, Bolshevik leaders did not turn against the party. To do so they would have had to make a united front with the plebeians. Instead of building a new party, or attempting to capture control of the old one from outside, these men bent all their efforts to gain re-admission! “Having been expelled from the party, we shall make every effort to return,” Christian Rakovsky and others declared in a formal statement. They felt themselves paralyzed, made useless, by the excommunication. Wherefore they lied to themselves and to others to get back. Wherefore they did not tell the country the truth about Stalin, even when they still had the power to do so. That would have reflected on the whole mystic unity and omniscience of the party. To achieve reinstatement the outcasts violated lifelong principles and throttled all sense of personal pride.

Feodor Dostoievsky, who understood his fellow-Russians like no one before or after him once wrote:

“The Russian people live entirely in orthodoxy and in the idea of it. Outside orthodoxy, there is nothing in them;

they have nothing and need nothing, for orthodoxy is everything; it is the Church and the Church is the crown of the edifice, and that to all eternity. . . . No one who does not understand orthodoxy will ever understand the Russian people. Nay more: he can never even love the Russian people; at best he will love an imaginary people, such as he desires to see in the Russian."

He referred to Christian orthodoxy, but his judgment applies equally well to the new Stalinist orthodoxy. The passion to conform, to merge the finite self into something infinite, was deeply planted in the fathers of the Bolshevik faith. And there we have the basis for something the outside world has been unable to understand—the Soviet system of public confession of political sin. The unity and rightness of the party must be maintained outwardly at any cost to individuals. Accepting blame for uncommitted crimes thus becomes a service to the cause. When discontents are rife and popular faith in the party is shaken, it becomes almost heroic for a fallen leader to take blame upon his own shoulders and thus exonerate the party. I underscore the idea at this point because we must understand it if the later extraordinary self-accusations and enthusiastic confessions by men like Bukharin, Rykov, Zinoviev, Yagoda are to make sense.

Worship of the party had been implicit in its structure from the beginning. But Stalin, as we have seen, himself intensified that worship. He, more than anyone else, turned the movement into a sect. With every year of his ascendancy there was less disagreement—and more heresy; there was more outward unanimity, less inner unity; less discussion of facts, more citation of texts. Only in the frame-

work of this deeply Russian sectarianism are the fantastic blood sacrifices, purges, confessions and self-righteous horrors of the Stalinist years comprehensible.

No sooner had Stalin's success become apparent, than the Opposition bloc fell apart. All but a few began to maneuver in panic for a path back to the bosom of the party. In December 1927 Stalin was able to announce "a declaration of unity signed by thirty-one Trotskyists"—in other words, an admission of political "guilt" as against the sacred party and a promise to sin no more. With ample justice, he called the declaration "hypocritical." From that time forward confessions, recantations, hyperbolic promises to follow the party (that is, to follow Stalin) without questioning became a routine of Soviet political life. The guilt of the victims amounted, in substance, to having menaced the unity of the party by holding minority opinions. It was thus that the Caucasian had turned the party mysticism into a guarantee of his everlasting infallibility!

Zinoviev and Kamenev were ready to capitulate on Stalin's terms. They were kept waiting six months before "the party" magnanimously re-admitted them. Others held out a little longer. One by one, all but a handful of the Oppositionists came crawling back on their knees, ready to do penance, ready to prove their loyalty by out-doing others in glorification of The Leader. During many years I watched this comedy of recantation and confession of imaginary sins. History yields few analogies for such large-scale degradation of the human spirit. The process was to reach a gory climax a decade later, when dozens of Old Bolsheviks would confess imaginary spying and

impossible sabotage and jejune murder plots—before they stepped in front of a firing squad. Having seen the moral degeneration in its milder early stages, I found it easier than most foreigners to understand the final demoralization later.

To the victor belong the spoils. Having conquered and banished Trotsky, Joseph Stalin immediately proceeded to confiscate—Trotsky's ideas.

He never had the slightest respect for ideas and programs anyhow. He respected only power. Once you had the whip hand, you took whatever ideas appealed to you and enforced them ruthlessly with "Leninist firmness." His enemies had accused Stalin of favoring the city tradesmen and well-to-do farmers. Abroad his new ascendancy was hailed as a triumph for "practical common sense" over crackpot theory. Stalin did not disillusion either his friends or his foes, until the whip was securely in his grip. Then he calmly took over the Opposition's program. He would show them whether he was a real revolutionary or not—he would out-Trotsky Trotsky.

The Opposition had talked of curbing the "kulaks" and industrializing the country. Stalin would destroy the kulaks and launch a Five Year Plan for super-industrialization "to catch up with and outdistance" the capitalist world. Others had theorized about leading the peasants into the new collectivized life. Stalin would drive them there with bayonets and death decrees. The Soviet millions, weary of experiments and sacrifices, were bewildered and horrified to find the whole Trotsky program being put into effect with Stalinist crudeness and brutality.

The outside world, too, gaped in astonishment. It had expected moderation but now witnessed Asiatic extremism on the Genghis Khan pattern. It watched the Kremlin boss drive his hordes of police, troopers, spies, and bureaucrats across the life of the country, cutting into the living flesh of the millions, leaving mountains of corpses in their wake. They left new factories, too, and railroads, harbors, mines—but these seemed an empty mockery against the universal wretchedness, the giant concentration camps, the man-made famine, the wholesale purges, the destruction of the last flickering sparks of human freedom and decency.

One must have seen the process, felt it in one's nerves, to believe it. I arrived in Russia early in 1928 and left early in 1934. I was therefore a witness to the whole incredible period of compounded horror. In a book of 650 pages, *Assignment in Utopia*, I tried later to convey the sense of this nightmare from which there was no awakening. No war in modern or ancient times has cost so many lives to one nation. It was a war in which there were no civilians—all men, women and children suffered the lash of terror, hunger, and overwork on their own backs.

A few in Stalin's Political Bureau protested against the undertaking as lunacy. They were the leaders who had just helped him crush Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky and imagined naïvely that they participated in Stalin's power. Rykov, Bukharin and Tomskey humbly pleaded against the devastating pace of industrialization plans, and warned against collectivizing the peasants by force. Even the mild, always-scared President Kalinin and Stalin's War

Commissar, Voroshilov, called feebly for some sane restraint.

Their protests never reached the country. We could only surmise what they said from the blatancy of the official campaign now unloosed against the new "Right" Opposition. Kalinin and Voroshilov surrendered immediately. The others held out for a while, then "confessed" their errors in ceremonies of public humiliation staged by Stalin with sadistic relish. The boss no longer needed caution. By this time he could annihilate without pretense.

One document has come down to us that shows a little of the horrified panic which Stalin's enmity inspired in the hearts of strong men like Rykov, Bukharin and Tomsky. We need merely multiply it a thousandfold to realize the panic of fear and loathing that he inspired in simpler men. But strong or weak alike were plowed down by his relentless will. He let the dreaded G.P.U. argue for him, and its arguments were unanswerable.

One night, in July 1928, Nikolai Bukharin came secretly to see Kamenev, whose downfall he had helped to achieve a few months earlier. Now he was a broken man, himself the chosen next victim among the once-mighty. To appreciate the melodrama of this meeting, recall that Bukharin had been considered, next to Lenin, the outstanding theoretician of the Bolshevik movement. He was the author, along with Preobrazhensky, of the *ABC of Communism*, until then the catechism of official communism the world over. Now he was at bay, betrayed by the crude Caucasian whom he had helped politically but always despised intellectually. He was hoping against hope



that the revolution might yet be wrenched from the death-grip of Stalin.

Bukharin was almost hysterical that night. He poured out his despair, his hatred and fear of Stalin. Kamenev wrote a detailed account of Bukharin's talk, quoting him verbatim on many points. He sent it to Zinoviev in his exile. It fell into the hands of Trotsky's followers and was ultimately published abroad. Thus we possess a rare document picturing Stalin as he appeared in a moment of crisis to one of the chief founders of the Soviet regime. In the long run Stalin's vengeance would catch up with Bukharin, with Kamenev to whom he talked, with Zinoviev to whom the talk was conveyed, with the Trotskyists who published the words for posterity. All, literally all, would be shot down by Stalin's firing squads. "To slake an implacable vengeance and then to go to sleep—there is nothing sweeter in the world."

Bukharin told his enemy of yesterday, "We consider Stalin's line fatal to the revolution. Our disagreements with Stalin are far, far more serious than those we have with you." The "we" referred to Prime Minister Rykov; to the head of the trade unions, Mikahil Tomsky; to the widow of Lenin; to scores of others of the new so-called Right Opposition. "For several weeks," Bukharin continued, "I have refused to speak to Stalin. He is an unprincipled intriguer who subordinates everything to his appetite for power. At any given moment he will change his theories in order to get rid of someone. . . . He maneuvers so that *we* appear as splitters. . . . You cannot trust him with the smallest document."

Bukharin described Stalin's current political ideas as "idiotic illiteracy." He showed, justly enough, that Stalin's "theories" were merely excuses for more centralized power, for "a police regime." The higher officials in Moscow and Leningrad, Bukharin revealed, were mostly anti-Stalin "but they are terrified when we speak of removing Stalin." A few more random citations from this tragic monologue to give the feel of the terrorism that gripped the Soviet leadership and the intriguing mind behind the terror:

"Andreyev is with us, but he is being removed from the Urals. Stalin bought the Ukrainians by removing Kaganovich from Ukraine. . . . Yagoda and Trilisser are with us. There have been 150 small rebellions. Voroshilov and Kalinin funk at the last moment. . . . Stalin has some special hold on them that I do not know of . . . Sergo (Ordzhonikidze) is without courage. He came to me abusing Stalin in the most vicious fashion, but at the decisive moment he betrayed us. . . ." A picture of the heads of a regime who hate Stalin, but obey through fear; a picture of strong men turned into cowards by an unscrupulous intriguer. "He (Stalin) is eaten up with the vain desire to become a well-known theoretician. He feels that it is the only thing he lacks. . . . The party and the state have become one: that is the misfortune . . . Stalin is only interested in power. While giving way he has kept hold of the leadership, and later he will strangle us. What is to be done? Psychological conditions in the Central Committee for dismissing Stalin are ripening but they are not yet ripe. . . . Stalin knows only vengeance, the dagger in the back. We must remember his theory

of sweet revenge. . . . Stalin's policy is leading us to civil war. He will be forced to drown the rebellion in blood. . . ."

Thus on and on for pages, until we can only shrink in disgust from the unruffled, sinister and sadistic figure depicted by one of his closest associates. Only a few months later Bukharin would be obliged to admit "error" and to praise Stalin's policies. His associates on the Right Opposition would be obliged to mount the platform at a party gathering and recite their contrition. The gnarled and stunted Rykov, like a figure out of Dostoievsky's more sinister pages, intoned his rehearsed speech of apology while Stalin's "boys" hooted and laughed and shouted it was not enough. Only once the old fire broke through. "It is not an easy thing," he threw at his tormentors, "to make a speech such as I am making!" Then his defiance fizzled.

Stalin's technique of gathering control slowly, using one group against the other, inciting jealousies and distrust through carefully casual gossip, oscillating between police threats and promises of rewards had worked perfectly. Left Opposition, Right Opposition—the words meant only that some men were opposed to Stalin's domination. Politics ceased to have meaning in terms of principle. It had taken "the wonderful Georgian" exactly ten years to defeat all of Lenin's comrades, piecemeal. But they were still alive—living corpses in prisons, places of exile, or in minor jobs after appropriate "public recantations" of their sins. In the following ten years he would complete the job by actually executing all his enemies, after dirtying their reputations and reducing them to the babbling idiocy

of "confessions" to non-existent crimes and praise of their executioner.

A new generation had grown up in the tortured Russia. It was pushing, ambitious, ignorant, calloused in its soul. It was a brutalized generation that knew nothing of pre-revolutionary Russia, less than nothing about the civilized, relatively free world beyond the Soviet frontiers. Terror was the natural element for these young men and women who had known nothing else since childhood. For Stalin they were perfect tools. From their midst he drew his new lieutenants, his new policemen, his new executioners. Of the Bolshevik character they inherited only the hardness and the disdain for human life. The means had in truth become the end. Far from being shocked by the need to murder the disciples of the deified Lenin, these coarse, tough upstarts went at the task with a great relish. The more killed off at the top, the more room for themselves.

The Trotskys and Bukharins might complain privately, they had little or no ground on which to complain publicly, to history. They were victims of a system of thought they had themselves helped to construct. Trotsky's own protests in later years would sound hollow, because he continued to accept the amoralism which had made Stalin master. As long as Trotsky, and others like him, justified the slaughter of Kronstadt workers and the system of family "hostages" in dealing with enemies, they were justifying their own fate and their enemy's triumph.

The distance between principled denial of moral factors and unprincipled cynicism is easily bridged. Only exceptional men can recognize and respect the boundary

between the two. Lenin had once, in a moment of despair, quoted the words of the great writer Chernichevsky about Russia: "Unhappy nation, nation of slaves; high and low, all are slaves." The country was enslaved to the party, the party in turn enslaved to Stalin.

## XIX

### THE GREAT WRETCHEDNESS

STALIN'S FIFTIETH BIRTHDAY came on December 21, 1929. The date may be taken as marking his achievement of complete despotic personal power. It inaugurated the Stalin era. The extraordinary celebration of that birthday was a sort of unofficial "crowning." Though he remained "Comrade" Stalin, he might as well have been called "Autocrat of all the Russias" like his predecessors. Indeed, another title was used by his underlings for the first time and has since become standard. It implies more autocratic authority than the title Czar. They now called him *Vozhd*, a word that has precisely the same connotation in Russian as ~~Führer~~ in German or *Duce* in Italian. He has remained ever since the *Vozhd*, infallible Leader and master of the Russian empire and also of that empire beyond Russia represented by the Third or Communist International.

It must be remembered that every phase of Stalin's concentration of power had been duplicated in each of the dozens of Communist Parties abroad. The Kremlin had captured the moral authority of Lenin. It had a monopoly of all the propaganda machinery. Most important, it had control of the pursestrings. In theory the Russian section was only one member of the International; in practice, the International was one division—and a relatively

minor one—of the Soviet government. Member parties had only the choice between obeying Moscow or being expelled.

When Trotsky and his so-called Left Opposition were eliminated, their partisans throughout the world were likewise eliminated. With the defeat of the Right Oppositionists, the International was likewise purged of their sympathizers. Those whose worship of Stalin was considered too lukewarm found themselves outside the ranks, excommunicated, in New York or Berlin no less than in Moscow. In many instances, indeed, the majorities of dissenting national parties were expelled and the Stalinist minorities recognized as the “official” party. On a few occasions entire parties were declared null and void, and new ones started by Stalin’s emissaries and instantly recognized by the International.

In the world Communist movement, as in Russia itself, those who remained were the cynical, the job-holders, the power-hungry, or the naïvely faithful holding on to the Kremlin and its symbolism no matter what happened.

That fiftieth birthday celebration remains etched in my own memory. It seemed to me, as I recorded later, “an imbecile anti-climax of the dream of erect men that the first socialist people should prostrate itself before a leader.” In all human history few men in their own lifetimes have been so shamelessly worshiped as Stalin on this occasion. An entire country groveled at the feet of the Caucasian *abrek*, in a display of fawning and sycophancy beyond description. Millions of words of praise flooded the land. His image became inescapable. Thousands of writers and historians and poets labored to elaborate a new “past” for

Stalin—a past in which only Lenin (now dead and mummified and impotent anyhow) was allowed a place by his side.

Everything that had been said or written before was canceled out. Historical museums expunged the names and memories of others and arbitrarily put Stalin in their places. Thereafter school books would be rewritten, monuments revised, memoirs composed to fix the lying legend on the nation's mind. Thereafter, unto this day, Stalin was to be referred to only as the Genius, the Great, the Beloved, the Infallible. Statues and portraits would show him only in heroic poses. Paintings would represent him at the head of great events in which he had no part. Cities would be named after him endlessly—Stalinabad, Stalingrad, Stalino, Stalinogorsk. He would become, by fiat, Lenin's chief agent within Russia before the revolution and his right-hand man after the revolution. He would become, by mere announcement, the creator of the Red Army and the victor of the civil wars. Poets would ransack the Psalms of David and the Arabian Nights for words with which to anoint his vanity. He would be The Sun of Our Lives, the Beloved of Our Souls.

The fiftieth birthday signaled the final triumph of mediocrity over genius.

There are no words to compass the might of Stalin in the years after his apotheosis. It can be described only in the language of shattering events. The measure of his power is contained neither in titles nor in statutes. He remained merely the Secretary General of the Communist Party of Russia, and his duties are nowhere recorded in law. But he is himself the party and the law. Only by



summarizing, however inadequately, the monumental horror that he visited on Russia do we reach an approximation of Stalin's authority.

Open opposition having disappeared, Stalin retired more deeply into the mysterious seclusion that suited his nature. The machinery of control was so well oiled that there was little need for him to appear personally, and the rare appearances at party functions became merely excuses for epileptic displays of fidelity and "love" for The Leader. For the country and for the outside world he became a force rather than a person. People referred to "him," to "the boss," avoiding mention of the ineffable name.

The Stalin era began with a great wretchedness which engulfed all classes and all places. Super-industrialization proceeded like a campaign of military subjugation. Even the vocabulary was that of war and conquest. The press, radio and speeches were filled with references to fronts, fortresses to be taken, shock troops, firing lines. Super-collectivization was in truth a brutal conquest of the peasantry. I tried later in *Assignment in Utopia*, to transmit my sense of this fact:

"What we witnessed was certainly not a revolution. It was not an eruption from below, but an organized imposition from above. Forcible collectivization was no more a 'revolution' than the seizure of India by Englishmen or Abyssinia by Italians, than the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 or the subjugation of red men by whites in the Americas. In the first agrarian revolution, in 1917, a pent-up fury and hunger broke through the dams of an established order—peasant masses 'liquidated' the land-

lords and seized their lands and a government rode to power on the crest of their revolt. But in 1930 a powerful dictatorship used its armies and its legalized local officials and social machinery to 'liquidate' a portion of the peasantry and to intimidate the rest.

"No, it was no revolution but a conquest of the peasantry. To argue that it may have been necessary or that it will ultimately benefit the people whom it affected, or that it had support in some sections of the invaded area, makes it no less a conquest; those are precisely the justifications advanced for every conquest from time immemorial.

"The ground was prepared in the skirmishing of 1929. The conquest was carried through in the first months of 1930. What followed in the next few years, when the liquidation of kulaks was completed and collectivization firmly established at an enormous cost in human life, was the 'pacification' of the vanquished, which always follows the conquest of a people stubbornly opposed to compulsory blessings."

Soon after his fiftieth birthday, Stalin announced the slogan "liquidation of the kulaks as a class." An innocent, almost technical phrase. But it was translated into death and suffering for millions of peasants whose only sin was that they owned more than one cow, or had tilled their land more profitably than others. Many of them, in fact, were even guiltless of those sins. They were classified as kulaks arbitrarily, because they resisted the forced collectivization ordered by the Kremlin.

The victims were stripped of their belongings and driven from their homes. Thousands of cattle-cars dumped

their human freight in the wilderness of Central Asia or the forests of the North. A fantastic terror reigned supreme in tens of thousands of villages as a hundred million simple peasants were herded into "collectives" against their will. The fate of the so-called kulaks was argument enough to "convince" most of them to seek shelter in the corrals. Those who demurred were killed or imprisoned.

No one will ever know how many were "liquidated," that is, driven from their homes to live or die in the harshest climates and conditions. Even Stalin's press agents abroad have put the figure at five million men, women and children. Others put it at twice that many. Beyond a certain point, numbers lose their significance—a million lives one way or the other, what difference? After all, there is no more suffering in the world than that which one human being can suffer; the torture of one man, woman or child is in that sense equivalent to the torture of all mankind. The individual or government which is capable of murdering one man is guilty of murdering mankind.

Rather than have their livestock nationalized, the peasants began to slaughter them. More than half the country's farm animals were destroyed in a few months—an economic disaster from which Stalinland has not yet fully recovered. The death penalty was thereupon decreed for the unauthorized killing of a cow, horse, pig or sheep! Destruction of human life did not touch the Kremlin. But the destruction of cattle was another matter, and Stalin called off the "liquidation" temporarily. Characteristically, he put the blame for cruel excesses on local officials—and after an interval gave the signal for the

forcible collectivization to proceed once more. In twelve years of voluntary collectivization, less than 2 per cent of the peasants had accepted the system. Now, in a single year, some 60 per cent accepted it. That is the true gauge of the pressure applied.

Hordes of peasants, dragging their miserable belongings, tried to escape across the frontiers into Rumania, Poland, the Baltic countries. Hundreds of them were shot down by Soviet border guards. Bloodhounds were set on the trail of those fleeing. The peasants on the Rumanian, Polish and Baltic side of the line watched this tragedy and thus came to know the horrors of Soviet dictatorship. Though they were themselves impoverished and often persecuted by their governments, these peasants felt themselves better off than the refugees from Stalinism. It is no accident that communism never took root in the areas touching the one communist nation.

Industrialization took almost as many victims as supercollectivization. Vast undernourished masses of men and women were driven to work on "industrial giants" amidst unspeakable hardships. They were herded in stinking barracks on starvation rations, under the supervision of the Secret Police. Strikes did break out occasionally, to be smothered quickly in official violence. Despite all the government could do to keep them on their jobs, millions of workers abandoned their work in the futile search for a little less misery. The rumor of larger bread allotments in some city would cause a migration in that direction. The press itself revealed that many factories suffered a total turnover of labor in three months, most of them in six months, all of them in the course of a year.

By 1932 the Kremlin imposed a passport system that in effect tied the workers to their jobs.

Great hydro-electric stations went up slowly, inefficiently, at a terrifying cost in human life, amidst purges, demonstration trials, epidemics, ever longer queues in front of shops in the cities, ever larger prisons and prison camps. Physicians who ventured to suggest the relationship between insufficient food and bad housing and the horrible growth of accidents in mines and factories were punished as traitors to the Five Year Plan.

Huge factories were constructed and long neglected areas opened to mining. Tens of thousands of engineers and specialists from Germany, England, the United States were brought in to help accomplish Stalin's expected miracle. What other nations had attained in generations, Stalin, with whip in hand, tried to do in a few years. There being no accumulated capital or other available wealth, everything had to be taken out of the stomachs and the hides of the population. The master was utterly disdainful of the human creatures whom he sacrificed to this supreme vanity of an all-powerful ignoramus.

A certain measure of success was achieved. There were statistical triumphs all around. The statisticians were careful to avoid calculations of costs. They were careful to emphasize quantity elements and close their eyes to quality factors. The industrialization was vast but inefficient, wasteful, completely out of balance. The ostensible "plan" was in truth a gargantuan chaos, without the slightest harmony of its parts. An overburdened transportation system, for example, made seeming success in other departments a tragic farce.

The great wretchedness spread and spread. First bread, then all foodstuffs, finally everything else were put on a ration basis. People gave their major energies to the panicky search for a little milk for their babies, a few rotted potatoes for themselves. The money wages increased—but the purchasing power of the ruble slid downward until it was less than 3 per cent of its face value. Embezzlement spread, despite death penalties for the theft of “state property” in a country where nearly everything was state property. Beggars infested the city streets. But the proceeds of theft and beggary became worthless—even money could not buy the essentials of life. They were doled out on the basis of elaborate favoritism, through special shops reserved for special categories of the population. Fantastic gradations of privilege arose everywhere.

Worst of all, the last lingering remnants of idealistic socialism were also thrown into the fires of super-industrialization. The pretense of workers’ participation in the management of industry was dropped. The state was engaged in the task of exploiting its slave-workers, without sentimental nonsense. It was determined to crowd generations of the “primitive exploitation” of capitalist history into a half-decade of state exploitation. The last vestiges of independence were taken away from the trade unions. They became simply a branch of the state apparatus, an additional instrument in the government’s hands for pressing more labor for less pay out of the industrial population. The worst type of American “company union” is more representative of labor’s intimate interests than the Soviet trade unions from this time forward.

In a panicky and futile effort to revive private initiative in the interest of bigger and better production, all the old capitalist devices of piece-work and bonuses and speed-up were introduced. Approximate equality of income, once an ideal, now became a crime against the state. Wages were differentiated, the spread between the highest and lowest categories growing wider with every year. Even as a goal for some distant future, the idea of men giving the best that was in them and obtaining sufficient for their needs was abandoned, was ridiculed as "bourgeois romanticism." The classic definitions of "socialism" were revised, often into something closely resembling their opposites.

Side by side with exploited "free" labor there grew up a system of outright forced labor, in prisons and concentration camps and labor battalions, without parallel since ancient times. The liquidated peasants and others mobilized by the G.P.U. for imaginary crimes provided the basis for the slave labor supply. The Secret Police became in time the largest single employer in Russia. Millions of prisoners cut timber, dug canals, built harbors and mined metals in distant places where "free" labor could not be driven. They died like flies, but new millions were always available to take their place. Contingents of these serfs were to be found on all construction projects. The system became an integral part of the Soviet economic set-up and persists to this day.

Again it is impossible to do more than estimate the numbers affected. I have seen estimates as high as ten million by men who had watched the forced-labor system at close range and offered impressive support for their figures.

Certainly a prison and prison camp population averaging five millions errs, if at all, on the side of understatement. A single project, such as the digging of the Baltic-White Sea Canal—appropriately named the Stalin Canal when completed—engaged an average of a quarter of a million men and women prisoners. I have talked to men who worked on that project. Conditions of labor were so onerous that tens of thousands died in their tracks. The magnitude of the slave-enterprise may be judged from the fact that 71,000 were amnestied or received reductions of sentence in the summer of 1933 in celebration of the completion of the job. Official admission of one such figure provides a peep-hole into a department of Stalinist life otherwise veiled from the world.

The finishing of another major forced-labor project, the double-tracking of a portion of the Trans-Siberian Railway, two years later, again caused a flurry of candor on the subject. Without giving total figures the Soviet press revealed enough to indicate that hundreds of thousands had been at work on railroad construction—all of them prisoners. They labored in sub-zero weather, sometimes up to the waist in icy water, many of the “phalanxes” of “labor soldiers” composed entirely of women.

A few years ago the G.P.U., in a mood of boastful indiscretion, listed some of the major industrial and construction undertakings under its direct control; in other words, the undertakings worked exclusively by prisoners. An American engineer familiar with Russian labor productivity estimated for me that those listed projects alone called for the labor power of at least five million prisoners.

But why discuss numbers? The so-called “free” labor



was only relatively free. The passportization system practically made all workers and peasants convicts at their jobs. It fixed their residences and tied them to their plows or workbenches as serfs were once tied to their land under feudalism. In every factory of any size there was a local office of the Secret Service.

And thus the drive for industrialization proceeded, in an atmosphere of fear, destitution and moral putrefaction.

## XX

### STALIN IN CLOSE-UP

AT THE CORE OF MOSCOW is its ancient fortress or *krem-lin*. Nearly a mile and a half of faded-red, crenelated wall encloses an aggregation of cathedrals, cloisters, palaces and living quarters. Eight centuries of Muscovite architecture are gathered here, Byzantine in mood, with the many clusters of church cupolas and spires in gild and deep pastel shades providing the accents. Here the Princes and later the Czars of Muscovy ruled until Peter the Great made his new hand-tooled city on the Neva his capital. Even after Peter, the Moscow Kremlin remained symbolically the heart of the great Slav empire. Coronations, for instance, were always staged here.

Considerations of greater military safety, however, rather than tradition moved Lenin to transfer the capital once more from Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg) to Moscow. And yet, with the passing years, as the distinctively Russian quality of the revolution asserted itself, the transfer became peculiarly appropriate. The city of Peter, his "window on Europe," seems a salute to the West. Moscow turns inward. Despite a gaudy subway and factory chimneys on the skyline it remains eternally Eastern, crowded, ragged, ripe with age. Behind the widened asphalted boulevards are narrow, tortuous alleys. The Kremlin seems a more fitting setting for Stalin the autocrat than any spot

Leningrad could have provided.

The gates of the Kremlin are carefully guarded, the comings and goings of people always under control. Inside, the clamorous Moscow seems to fall away. The streets are wide, the squares spacious, footsteps echo through a hushed atmosphere. The Kremlin seems magically remote from the harsh realities of life outside its gates. Its peaceful, superior mood always reminded me of the Vatican grounds in Rome.

Here Stalin lives in a modest apartment of three rooms, with the two children born to him and Nadezhda Alliluyeva. His cravings for power and adulation and a place in history were to grow with indulgence. But in his everyday life his tastes remained simple almost to the point of crudeness. Moscow continually whispered scandal and innuendo about the private lives of its Bolshevik masters, some of it true, some apocryphal. There were titillating stories of commissars and Red Army leaders who discarded their old-fashioned wives to marry ballet girls and actresses. Anecdotes flourished around the weaknesses of various commissars for the bottle and the fleshpots. None of this ever touched Stalin. Even those who hated him with a desperate hate and blamed him for sadistic cruelties never accused him of excesses in his private life.

When Alliluyeva died suddenly, in November 1932, ugly stories of suicide and even poisoning were circulated. But few credited them. I talked at the time to Russians who had access to the Kremlin and who were candid in private conversation with me. They were certain that Stalin had been deeply attached to his young wife and that she

had died suddenly of peritonitis due to a neglected appendix condition.

Stalin smokes a great deal, drinks wine in moderation, eats heartily. Occasionally he attends a new play or a ballet. Several times, to my own knowledge, special performances and concerts were arranged late at night for him. For the rest, in the hour of his glory as in the years of his underground life, he has little time and little inclination for a private life outside his work and career. Those who measure "success" by millions of dollars, yachts and mistresses find it hard to understand power relished in austerity, its tang sharpened immeasurably by an inner illusion of self-sacrifice for some cause, even the passions of cruelty and revenge rationalized into services to "history."

Usually Stalin receives delegations and individual visitors in his offices and conference rooms in one of the Kremlin palaces. It was here that he consented to be photographed by James E. Abbe, an American—the only time he allowed himself to be "shot" by a foreign cameraman. Here, in most cases, he met the few foreign writers and diplomats who have talked to him. But his principal offices are in a plain, businesslike six-story building a dozen blocks from the Kremlin, on Old Square. It is the headquarters of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Traffic is diverted from the square, and the building itself is heavily guarded.

The typical Russian office is a bedlam of noise, tea-drinking, dusty papers, and general excitement. The office of the Secretary General is therefore startling in its quiet and orderliness. Late in the afternoon of November

22, 1930 I was invited to visit Stalin there. In previous years he had received an American labor delegation and some of its members later wrote articles about the experience. He had also been interviewed by a Japanese correspondent. But all that was before the final elimination of the Oppositions and the unofficial "crowning" on his birthday. For no merit of my own, I was given the first interview with Stalin after his achievements of total power.

I was announced by a woman at a telephone switchboard in the anteroom, conducted through a long corridor, then into a very small office where a couple of secretaries and one man in G.P.U. uniform greeted me. From here a door opened into a large, elongated room—a long conference table, chairs and a few bookcases almost its only furnishings. Pictures of Lenin and Marx were on the wall; there was no picture of Stalin—perhaps the only official office in all of Russia without that standard equipment. Stalin met me at the doorway, gave me a vigorous handshake and smiled a warm welcome. Perhaps there was an undertone of amusement in the smile. This business of meeting the press seemed to him, I am sure, an outlandish procedure.

There was something about his behavior which put me instantly at ease. During years of residence in Moscow I had come to share, inevitably, the feeling of mystery touched with awe that surrounded the man. But that feeling evaporated in the contact with his authentic simplicity. He pulled up a chair for me at the far end of the conference table, offered me a cigarette and lighted one for himself. Then he leaned back in his chair in a way that implied there was no hurry—the revolution, the Five

Year Plan, the roundup of communist heretics could wait. I had been promised a few minutes in his presence, merely to assure the world that Stalin had not been assassinated as Riga, Warsaw and other capitals were reporting. But we talked for more than an hour, and I remained in his offices for another hour writing the interview while he waited.

The sense of a methodical, unhurried personality grew on me as the interview proceeded. His every motion seemed deliberate, his every word rehearsed in his mind before it was uttered. I had seen him a good many times in the preceding years from a distance and his image was imprinted on my mind from the teeming pictures and statues of him in the midst of which I was living. Yet I was not prepared for the physical man as he actually was in close-up. His features were grosser, more "human" than I had imagined; the complexion was a deeper olive than his pictures conveyed and the pock-marks more visible; he seemed, though the expression scarcely conveys the feeling, more "Asiatic." I remember thinking, as we talked, that he looked more than his fifty-one years, that his mustache was shaggier, his smile more convincing than I would have supposed.

The end of 1930 was a time of tension and routine brutalities on a national scale. As the propagandist enthusiasms for the Five Year Plan evaporated, police pressures took their place. Thousands of lives were being shoveled into the furnaces of a mystic sacrificial consecration to Machinery. Prisons were filling up, new ones were being built. A hundred million peasants were being terrorized into submission. It was as though the concept of human being had been forgotten—the entire population was

so much raw stuff for the shaping of a new type of life. Executions for sabotage, for theft, for vague disloyalties were becoming so commonplace that one no longer noticed the routine announcements in the press. I had just sat through the sensational show trial of eight eminent professors accused of sabotage, espionage and plotting with foreign governments: the Ramzen trial. More than two thousand intellectuals had been arrested in connection with the accusations—these eight were dragged into the floodlights of a public demonstration. The signs of rough police invention were thick on the trial; two of the men involved in “confessions,” for instance, had died long before they were supposed to have participated in the “plots.”

All this horror, inhumanity and chicanery flowed from the man Stalin. With a single word he could have stopped it, changed its direction. His authority was so complete that the responsibility for the sufferings of every last peasant child, for the horrors in every G.P.U. torture chamber, was as much his as if he had inflicted the pain with his own hands.

Yet, there he sat in front of me, this Stalin, quietly smoking a cigarette, answering my questions patiently, repeating the answers when he thought I had not grasped the Russian. There was nothing remotely ogre-like in his looks or conduct, nothing theatrical in his manner. A pleasant, earnest, aging man—evidently willing to be friendly to the first foreigner whom he had admitted to his presence in years. “He’s a thoroughly likeable person,” I remember thinking as we sat there, and thinking it in astonishment.

After the first fifteen minutes the door suddenly opened

and Klementi Voroshilov, Trotsky's successor as Commissar of War, looked in. He was apparently looking for Stalin, and perhaps unaware that his chief was entertaining an American newspaperman. He apologized for the intrusion and was about to withdraw. But I suggested boldly that he join us and Stalin smiled his consent. The contrast between the two men was instantly apparent. About Stalin there was a sense of great inner strength held carefully in reserve, like wild animals on the leash. The War Lord was ebullient, obviously extravert. Voroshilov is a smaller man than Stalin, compact, rosy-cheeked, fairly spurting vitality. He seemed eager and temperamental against the relaxed stolidity of Stalin. At some points in the next half-hour, indeed, I sensed a flicker of annoyance on Stalin's part as Voroshilov bubbled over with words, questions, quips. The sight of Stalin submitting to an interview seemed to afford him immense amusement. When I carried my interrogation into Stalin's personal life, asking about his family, the War Commissar slapped his thighs in glee.

The substance of the interview was published throughout the world at the time by the United Press. There was nothing about it, in sober truth, in the least startling. Later I came to rebuke myself for having missed the chance to ask more searching, more impertinent questions. What I did perhaps convey to the outside world was one man's intimate impression of Stalin's outer personality—a certain shyness in his contact with people, a real simplicity, an almost nerveless deliberateness about his movements. I tried, too, to convey my impression of his mind—neither brilliant nor stimulating, but careful, shrewd, organized and tenacious. Not once in more than an hour did I recognize



a flash of insight, a turn of phrase or thought above the humdrum, any touch of mental impetuosity. He talked—and thought—like one of the more banal *Pravda* editorials.

When we rose from the conference table, Stalin said he would be interested to see what I would make of the interview. He had no wish to interfere with what I would write—merely curious, he indicated. The whole thing, when I thought of it afterwards, seemed ironical. My dispatch would have to go through one of Stalin's censors; he scarcely needed a reporter's "permission" to see a story in advance of publication.

"If you could let me have a Latin-script typewriter," I suggested, "I could write my dispatch right here and show it to you before I left."

Stalin walked slowly (that careful, almost feline walk of his is one of my clearest memories of the meeting) into the adjoining office and instituted a search for a Latin-script machine. It was soon found and I was installed in a small room to write my piece. Tea and sandwiches were sent in while I worked, and once or twice Stalin looked in to see that his guest was comfortable. When I completed the dispatch, nearly an hour later, I returned to the large room, and found Stalin, Voroshilov and the interpreter still there.

Stalin smiled as my long cable was translated to him. At several points he suggested minor changes, on unimportant factual details. Then I asked him to sign the top copy. It would help me get the story by the Press Department censors, I ventured an obvious pleasantry. And so he wrote, at the bottom of the dispatch: "*More or less correct, J. Stalin.*" In the spirit of the cordial exchange, I

wrote a few words of thanks for his patience at the bottom of the carbon copy and gave it to him. I still have my copy with Stalin's inscription. Somewhere in his files, maybe, is the one I gave him in exchange.

One of the questions I had asked him that late afternoon was: "Are you a dictator?"

There was a quickening of Voroshilov's interest, as we waited for the dictator's answer. Stalin smiled, implying that the question was on the preposterous side.

"No," he said slowly, "I am no dictator. Those who use the word do not understand the Soviet system of government and the methods of the Communist Party. No one man or group of men can dictate. Decisions are made by the party and acted upon by its chosen organs, the Central Committee and the Politburo."

In his own fashion he possibly meant it too. He had identified himself and the party, the "church" and its high-priest, so completely that he heard the party's voice issuing from his own mouth. He acted through a Central Committee and a Political Bureau—the membership of which he picked himself and discarded at his own convenience. Besides, this was 1930; perhaps the transition to personal autocracy had not yet been completed in Stalin's psychology. As time went on he needed less rationalization for his position.

## XXI

### BUILDING SOCIALISM

ALL THE CRUEL REFINEMENTS of industrial speed-up methods against which liberals have been fighting for generations were introduced by Stalin under euphemistic "socialist" names. Piece-work, bonuses, artificial competition between workers and groups of workers. And amazingly the liberals abroad hailed these innovations with a great clanging of cymbals. It was enough for these foreign enthusiasts that the speed-up was ordered by a "workers' government." The factories where workers were sweated and half-starved were "owned by the people" and that sufficed for the hypnotized hallelujah-shouters. Modern times, indeed, can show no stranger irony than this: that Stalin's greatest prestige in the outside world coincided with the greatest suffering and the perfection of techniques of oppression inside Stalin's country.

There was a good reason for the paradox. Stalin's attainment of the pinnacle of power coincided with the breakdown of economic life abroad. The Five Year Plan seemed an answer to the Depression. In their eagerness to believe that someone somewhere had the answer, millions of frightened middleclass people in all countries of the world flocked to Stalin's standard. He had no need to convince them, since they were insanely determined to believe, and ready to tear to pieces anyone who ques-

tioned the Soviet propaganda claims. The Depression frightened millions of people who had felt fairly secure until then. Fascist dictatorships were rising in many places. The shiny slogans of the Soviet land seemed to promise hope in a dark world. Bolshevism—or rather, a caricature of Bolshevism—“caught on” and in time became even fashionable among the middle classes of the Western world.

Crowds of tourists trooped gaily amidst the horrors, begged to be doped with medicated statistics, and returned home with the glad tidings of Utopia-in-construction. Nearly all of these people were to look back in later years and marvel at their own gullibility. To those of us on the scene, aware of the horrors in sharp detail rather than in diffused generalizations that could be brushed aside as “unimportant,” the phenomenon of foreign enthusiasm for Stalin’s methods of “building socialism” with bayonets was endlessly fascinating. We ceased to argue with the excited visitors as they talked the gibberish of their imported preconceptions. It was like watching the machinery of a mass psychosis exposed to the naked eye.

The visitors and the paid propagandists were content with words and labels. In a country where there is only one employer, the state, workers can be dismissed for a single lateness; and dismissal may mean loss of home as well as job. But that passed as “socialist industry.” The term “collective farm” sounded to outsiders like something on the co-operative order. They did not pause to discover that it is simply the state-feudal factory system extended to the land. The peasant on the collective works for the state and is completely at the mercy of the state,

precisely like the worker in the factory. He might as well be subjected to a feudal landlord. At best he is a sharecropper on the government's estates, his every move and thought regulated from the center of power. The collective has not even the right to own machinery, which it must rent from the state at the state's own price.

The world read the fancy labels and applauded the "victories" on the various "fronts" of the Five Year Plan.

This first phase of triumphant Stalinism saw the development of that amazing Soviet contribution to the arts of mass propaganda: the show or demonstration trial. It is one of the most characteristic products of Stalin's mind. In a sense it is another expression of Bolshevism as a sect. The trials are really morality plays. The forces of Evil, represented by the political villains of the moment, are confronted by the powers of Good, the state and the party, and duly conquered in mock combat. The outcome is known in advance; the lines of the play are prescribed in advance. The external paraphernalia of judges, prosecutors, testimony suffice to fool naïve outsiders into accepting the proceedings as a real trial. But the guilt of the victims is taken for granted. The purpose is to "demonstrate" that guilt, to dramatize it, rather than to prove it. The defendants have been selected in the first place from a larger number because of their special suitability or talents for the role.

The first such trial, the so-called Shakhty affair, took place in 1928. I reported it for the American press. Fifty-

odd engineers in the coal industry were accused of sabotaging production, installing defective machinery and conspiring with foreign capitalists and émigré Russians to undermine Soviet economy. Most of the accused admitted their guilt, admitted it enthusiastically, and begged to be allowed to live and prove their contrition. They confessed with a masochistic relish. They admitted sins of which they were not even accused and shouldered responsibility for crimes with which they could not possibly have had any connection. The coal industry had, in fact, worked extremely badly—the trial was intended to illustrate why. It was a show to dramatize the claim that the country was honeycombed with internal enemies who must be crushed mercilessly. But the coal industry continued to work badly after the trial and the executions.

A few of the accused actually defended themselves. They fought to safeguard their professional and personal honor. These flaws in the staging would be eliminated as time went on. Confessions would become more hearty and in the end unanimous. Death sentences would be meted out to practically everybody involved. The Shakhty affair was only the first outline of what would emerge as the totalitarian demonstration trial.

The next large show of this type was the Ramzin trial, at the end of 1930. Again engineers and professors were the objects of vengeance. Again they admitted everything from industrial sabotage at home to fantastic plotting with Premier Poincaré of France and Colonel Lawrence of England abroad. Millions marched through the streets of the country shouting "Death to the Wreckers!" A

saturnalia of hate was unloosed suddenly, deliberately, through the press, radio, billboards. It was ended just as suddenly when the state decided to do so. There was nothing remotely spontaneous about the performance.

Both trials were only climactic points in a continuous persecution of the pre-revolutionary educated classes, the technical intelligentsia. Engineers, specialists, professional men and women were arrested by the thousand. They were assumed to be guilty whenever industry limped or living conditions grew worse. Their children were barred from schools, their food rations cut. And this curious hate for the educated was only one phase of a larger revolt against intelligence. The Academy of Science, for ten years unmolested by the revolution, was now "purged" and stocked with Soviet mediocrities. All arts and sciences, even medicine, were forced into the uniforms of a pseudo-Marxism. The theater and the cinema, which had shown great vitality and creative robustness even in the most difficult years after the revolution, now became sterile adjuncts of the Five Year Plan and merely additional megaphones for shouting the greatness of Stalin.

The political terror of these years has been compared to the Terror of the French Revolution. The comparison is misleading. The French Terror was born in the hearts and nerves of the populace. It had the excuse of mass madness, something elemental and beyond control, like an earthquake or flood. The Stalin Terror did not spring from the people, but was imposed upon them from above. A certain amount of popular emotion was artificially stirred up. But it expressed the panic of a small ruling group, rather than the madness of an entire people. Ter-

ror was applied by the masters, and was not, as in the French Revolution, an expression of the feelings of the slaves.

The importation of foreign machinery and foreign brains soon emptied the state treasury of its *valuta*—gold, foreign exchange and other wealth acceptable abroad. Barbarian devices for pressing the last ounce of *valuta* out of the population were therefore developed. Some of these devices were open. There were special shops, called Torgsin, where the foodstuffs and other products not available elsewhere could be bought for gold, silver, and foreign currency. A system of ransoms was announced: friends and relatives could arrange for the release of Soviet citizens from Stalin's Utopia by paying specified amounts in foreign currency.

But there were also secret devices. Tens of thousands of people suspected of possessing valuables were rounded up by a special division of the G.P.U. and tortured—I use the word advisedly and literally—until they “voluntarily” admitted and surrendered their hidden wealth. Often weeks of medieval inquisition forced a former businessman to give up a few hundred American dollars saved from the NEP period, when money was stable and foreign currency within everyone's reach. The torture chambers, however, were not reserved for members of “liquidated” classes. The G.P.U. made no class distinctions in its arrests of suspects: servant girls, professors, factory workers were sweated and frozen and terrorized indiscriminately. It was the state frankly going in for robbery of its citizens, without even a pretense of legality. To this day the horrifying business, known intimately to the whole



country, is "denied" by the government. In my own mind it remains as an epitome of Stalinism. The ethics of Caucasian brigandage had become the ethics of the state he had captured.

Despite the tremendous investments of life and substance, the end of the first Five Year Plan found Soviet industry and agriculture bloated but unproductive, crippled in many of its limbs. The countryside was a cemetery of broken-down machinery. The mass-production factories built under foreign engineering supervision began to break down almost before they were put into operation. It was possible to build structures under the prod of bayonets. It was not possible to make them stand up and produce goods. The execution and imprisonment of hundreds of engineers and skilled workers did nothing to speed up production or improve the quality of products.

NEP, of course, had disappeared entirely in these years. Although they had operated legally in conformity with Lenin's own plans, the Nepmen were treated as outlaws, deprived of civil rights, taxed retroactively and rounded up for concentration camps. By the end of 1929 there was not a single private shop in all of Moscow. Even the individual artisans—shoemakers, carpenters, tailors and so on—who had supplied a large part of Russia's everyday needs, now vanished from the scene.

At the very moment that Stalin ordered a celebration of the "fulfilment" of the Five Year Plan, at the end of 1932, standards of living were lower than any time in the memory of living Russians. The NEP years began to look like the "good old days" by contrast. Moreover, by the spring of 1932 official violence on the countryside had

produced its convulsive reaction, in a fearful famine lasting till the fall of 1933. It decimated the population of the regions which had presumably been "100 per cent collectivized," the Ukraine and Northern Caucasus, and also took immense toll of life in Soviet Central Asia.

It was a man-made famine. The peasants, resenting loss of the land they considered their own, had planted only enough for themselves. It was not a "plot." The notion of some forty million peasants, without leaders, plotting anything is insane. They merely reacted to pain, and those who inflicted the pain are thus responsible for the tragedy. Stalin faced the choice: either to let the peasants keep their grain, or to take it away by force and let them starve. He decided to punish them for their insubordination—with death.

For years the Soviet government succeeded in concealing the fact, and then the magnitude, of this catastrophe. Foreign reporters in Moscow were not allowed to visit the scenes of devastation. Yet the essential facts were known and in time seeped out to the outside world. A few years after the catastrophe even professional apologists for Stalin like Louis Fischer and Maurice Hindus admitted that millions died in that famine. I was myself given the shocking figure of seven million dead by Ukrainian officials with whom I discussed the famine off-record. Probably an estimate of four to five million corpses is closest to the facts.

The "celebration" of the success of the first Five Year Plan was staged in Russia—and echoed throughout the world—while wagons went from house to house in Ukrainian cities to collect the dead. An American engineer re-

turning from Turkestan at this time, described to me how bodies were piled up along the edges of the roads, like so many logs shoved out of the way.

The Caucasian *abrek* ruled alone. But what did he rule over? A mass of writhing wretchedness; terrorized slaves, beaten into obscene meekness but filled with volcanic hatreds that must one day overflow in another and no less brutal revolution against the new despot. The age-old dream of a free socialist society had degenerated into the ugly reality of the largest prison camps in all history, the largest slave-regime of all time.

The labels were "socialist," the slogans "Marxist." Stupid or wishful thinking radicals abroad, most of them high-minded, were content to accept the labels and the slogans and the phony statistics for the living reality. But the fraud could not last forever. Years after the fact, the system of forced labor and man-made famine and the unprecedented suppression of human decencies—let alone such luxuries as civil rights—were admitted and understood. But in those first years of the Stalin era deluded "men of good will" joined in a conspiracy of silence around Russia. More obscene: they shouted hurrah for the horrors and stoned those who would tell them a portion of the truth.

A terse summary of this moment of the "triumphant" Five Year Plan has been conserved for future historians in an extraordinary document that has not yet received the attention it merits. In December 1937 the Russian émigré newspaper *Socialist Messenger*, in Paris, published a long anonymous letter smuggled out by a Bolshevik leader. Later an English translation was put out as a



#### DICTATOR AND STAFF

Stalin, sitting, second from left, among his associates of 1934. *Front row:* Sergei Ordzhonikidze, who died in 1936; Stalin; Premier Viacheslav Molotov; Sergei Kirov, Leningrad "boss" whose assassination touched off the purges of 1934-38. *Back row:* Abel Yenukidze, long Stalin's most intimate friend, executed in the great purge; War Commissar Klement Voroshilov, Lazar Kaganovich, still high in Stalin's favor; Valerian Kuibishev, whose death in 1937 was blamed on Communist plotters.



pamphlet in New York under the title *Letter of an Old Bolshevik*. Authorship has generally been credited to Alexei Rykov, Lenin's successor as Premier, but not wholly confirmed. In any case, the authenticity of the letter was vouched for by the editors of the newspaper—men of the type of Dan and Abramovich—and, more important, it bears convincing internal evidence of detailed inside knowledge of affairs in the highest Kremlin circles. I shall have occasion to refer to this document further on. At this point let me quote a passage describing the period when millions in Russia and beyond its frontiers were “celebrating” Stalin's achievements:

“This was at the end of 1932, when the situation in the country was similar to 1921—the time of the Kronstadt rebellion. In 1932, it is true, there were no actual revolts, but many believed that it would have been better if the government had had to deal with actual revolts. Half of the country was stricken with famine. The workers were on short rations. The productivity of labor had greatly fallen, and there was no way of raising it, for it was not a question of unwillingness on the part of the workers, but of physical impossibility of working productively on an empty stomach. The predominant view in party circles was that Stalin had led the country into an impasse by his policy, that he had roused the peasants against the party, and that the situation could be saved only by his removal from party domination. Many influential members of the Central Committee were of this opinion.”

It was at this period, too, that a once-powerful Bolshevik, M. N. Riutin, while in a prison “isolator,” worked out a “program” for saving the country from Stalin. Smug-

gled out of prison, the program (mimeographed on tissue paper) circulated among the highest officials. Let me quote once more from the *Letter of an Old Bolshevik*:

“Riutin’s program was remarkable chiefly for its severe criticism of Stalin. It was 200 pages long, 50 of which were devoted to Stalin’s personal characteristics, to a consideration of the part he had played in the party, and to the reasons for the basic contention that unless Stalin was removed from party domination there could be no recovery in the party or in the country. These views were expressed with remarkable vigor and made a deep impression. Stalin was depicted as the evil genius of the Russian Revolution, who, actuated by vindictiveness and lust for power, had brought the revolution to the edge of the abyss.”

It is against these somber realities that we must necessarily view the hyperbolic glorification of The Leader which now developed. With every year it departed more boldly from the rational. It became more mystical and hysterical. What were once comradely greetings now evolved into hymns of praise and rituals of propitiation. Every speech, resolution and editorial must begin and end with quotations from Stalin and invocations to the ineffable name. The press fell into a way of printing Stalin’s name in larger letters than the rest of the text. His standardized heroic portraits decorated not only general and political magazines, but publications devoted to engineering, medicine, aviation. Articles on all subjects found ways of dragging in “As our great Stalin said—.” Gatherings of kindergarten children or bearded Acade-

micians began and concluded their proceedings with expressions of "thanks" to Stalin.

A Soviet chess master won a tournament in London. He telegraphed his thanks to Stalin, whose inspiration had made the chess victory possible. Stratosphere and round-world fliers, if they succeeded, credited the achievement to Stalin's genius. If they failed, their widows and orphans laid at the feet of the *Vozhd* their gratitude for the state pensions. In 1935 a World Congress of Writers was held in Russia. A Soviet author, Avdeyenko, recited the blessings brought to mankind and to him personally, by the genius of The Leader, ending every sentence with a ritualistic "Thanks, Stalin!" He reached the climax with this: "My wife expects a baby and the first word our child shall pronounce shall be the name Stalin!" The congregation applauded. It included men like André Malraux, Louis Aragon, Ilya Eherenberg.

The highest peak in the Pamirs has been named for Stalin. The best steels are called "stalinite." You travel in Stalin cars on Stalin trains, along Stalin canals, past Stalin factories, through cities called Stalin; his name is shouted at you through every printed column, every billboard, every radio. His image is ubiquitous—picked out in flowers on public lawns, in electric lights, on postage stamps; it is for sale in plaster-of-Paris and bronze busts in nearly every shop, in crude colors on tea-cups, in lithographs and picture post-cards.

Knowing that his sense of intellectual inferiority needs continuous salving, writers and speakers go to insane extremes in crediting him with cultural and intellectual powers that would dwarf a Goethe. The flattery is so



hyperbolic that we might suspect crude mockery, except that it is in the spirit of all other types of adulation. From a periodical called *Cultural Front*: "In reality, certain pronouncements of Aristotle have only been fully deciphered and expressed by Stalin." Stalin is described as among "authoritative specialists in contemporary philosophic problems," as one "always distinguished for his profound understanding of literature," as among "profound connoisseurs and critics of Hegel." An editorial on the eve of a party congress declares: "Can anyone really write on anything unless he knows his Stalin? Never! Without Stalin no one can understand anything or write anything of interest." The flattery is crude, saccharine, childish.

From the New York *Daily Worker*, December 21, 1937, I cite the following, composed by a Soviet Daghestan woman and solemnly translated by Isidore Schneider, an "American" poet:

Above the valley  
The mountain peak,  
Above the peak  
The sky.  
But Stalin,  
Skies have no height  
To equal you,  
Only your thoughts  
Rise higher.  
The stars, the moon  
Pale before the sun  
That pales in turn  
Before your shining mind.

*Pravda*, Moscow organ of the Communist Party, published a translation of an Uzbek poem:

O great Stalin, O leader of the peoples.  
Thou who broughtest men to birth,  
Thou who fructifiest the earth,  
Thou who restorest the centuries,  
Thou who makest bloom the spring,  
Thou who makest vibrate the musical chords.

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Thou, splendor of my spring, O Thou,  
Sun reflected by millions of hearts.

A Ukrainian effusion halts in wonder before the glowing syllables of the deified name of Stalin:

His name has the ring of the Soviet millions,  
Six letters embody the oneness of aim,  
The aim of millions traversing your pathway  
My country whose valorous sons are your fame.

From distant Daghestan the voice of Soviet People's Poet Stalsky rings out to announce, "You have preserved 'gainst wiles of knave, the testament that Lenin gave." Which is perhaps indiscreet, considering the lengths to which Stalin went to suppress Lenin's last testament. Comrade Stalsky goes on:

The house we dwell in shall not fade,  
Foundations were by Lenin laid.  
This house, we know, shall stand.  
'Twas made  
By you, the cosmic builder Stalin.

The tides of adulation have been rising ever since. Throughout the world sycophants, sentimentalists and anxious job-holders in Communist Parties and on communist publications echo the deification in the controlled Soviet press. Though not as lush as in Oriental Daghestan or Uzbekistan, the orgiastic praise by the faithful in the

West has much of the same mystical acceptance. A Seattle woman, Anna Louise Strong, records for posterity that thirty minutes in the presence of Stalin, at a committee meeting, changed her understanding of life. Kyle Crichton, an editor of *Collier's*, writes in the *New Masses* about an inferior Soviet propaganda film: "There is something *cleansing and noble* about it, just as there is something fine and touching about a visit to Lenin's tomb." The familiar exultant religious note. Wherever the sway of the Kremlin is felt within Russia and without, there Stalin is "the greatest of the great . . . the greatest leader of all times and all nations . . . the Genius-Leader of the International Working Class. . . . Our Sun."

The orgy of self-abasement is the more fantastic when we realize that there is in it no trace of spontaneous affection, but only fear and awe. To the broad masses of simple-minded workers and peasants Stalin is a terrifying force to be propitiated with ritualistic resolutions of exuberant worship. To the thinking minority, cynical conformity is little more than protective coloration. For those in the uppermost reaches of the bureaucracy it is a political stratagem. The power which they share needs to be personalized. . . . "It's the only way our Russians understand authority," some of them have explained to me. But from top to bottom the glorification is devoid of honest emotion.

The very formulas of praise are prescribed. Let Kaganovich or Voroshilov refer to Stalin as the Great Engineer of Souls and instantly a million editorials, billboards, resolutions and radio programs bleat "Hail the Great Engineer of Souls!" Lesser men do not even risk the invention

of new figures of speech. The official press launches a new superlative and a million voices echo it. Incessantly the chorus howls hallelujahs of love and thanks. But the elaborate machinery of suppression, which flourishes in direct proportion to the volume of hallelujahs, is a refutation of the litanies of affection. No ruler enjoying a thousandth part of the love and admiration expressed for Stalin would have need for the world's largest Secret Service, the vastest professional and amateur spy system in history, the most populous prison camps on the face of the globe.

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## XXII

### COUNTER-REVOLUTION

BEGINNING WITH THE EARLY 1930's, the biography of Stalin merges into the history of Russia so completely that it is impossible to isolate the elements that are strictly biographical. Stalin is Russia and Russia is Stalin. There are constitutions, parliaments, congresses, plans, policies. But they are only aspects of Stalin's authority, echoes of his whims, facets of his personality. Even catastrophic famine, once left to the elements, now derives from Stalin. The vision of a co-operative collective society fades into a personal despotism that rests on police, subservient bureaucrats, executioners and Praetorian guards. The name of the party is still invoked by Stalin and his underlings. In truth, however, the party as a functioning, initiating body has been abolished—converted into one more instrumentality of the autocrat's absolutism.

Superficial observers still refer to the Soviet political system as a one-party regime, the equivalent of the one-party regime in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Actually it has been transformed these many years into a no-party regime: a one-man regime.

In May 1935, Stalin "liquidated" the Society of Old Bolsheviks—veterans of the Leninist movement. Stalin himself had helped to invest this organization with an almost religious significance. The veterans were presum-

ably living repositories of the idealism, the revolutionary zeal, the romance of the new system. Stalin had utilized the prestige of the Society and its members against Trotsky, whose Bolshevism was of more recent vintage and whose appeal, at one point, was to the younger Bolsheviks. But now he no longer needed them. On the contrary, their existence seemed a rebuke to his absolutism. They seemed a living refutation of his refurbished biography. Whatever others might be forced to believe about his pre-revolutionary and civil war role, these old-timers knew better. Other venerated "veteran" institutions—the Association of Former Political Prisoners, the Communist Academy—were likewise "liquidated" in short order. More and more, Stalin and his obedient press began to blur the line between party members and others who served the master. The heretical phrase "non-Party Bolsheviks" gained currency.

In the years immediately after the death of Lenin, rank-and-file opinion in the ruling party was still a genuine political force. True, it was often regimented, shamelessly distorted and misrepresented by political trickery. But it did count. Stalinist henchmen were obliged to corral support, to jockey for majorities. But increasingly this influence from below upward dried up. Those with a weakness for asking questions and making protests were eased out, purged, bought off. The party congealed into a dead and meaningless unanimity.

In the end it turned into a rubber-stamp for decisions made without the formality of consulting the party memberships or even its leaders. Tomskey, ostensibly the head of the trade unions, had been removed for months be-

fore the fact itself was revealed to the trade union membership. Changes in government and party personnel were made by the Politburo—where Stalin's voice was law—and announced to the country. Somersaults in domestic and foreign policy were made without the pretense of discussion. Party members, like the least important peasants or workers, would first learn of profound revolutions within the revolution from the newspapers or the radio announcements.

The *physical* elimination of the Old Bolsheviks, and of those whose psychological allegiance was still with the original revolution, was inevitable. The great purges of 1934-39, which I shall touch on in the following chapters, were little more than a mopping-up process. Melodramatic though they have been, the purges were less important historically than the virtual *counter-revolution* which preceded them. That counter-revolution made the human remnants of the revolution superfluous. Unable to absorb them, the absolutist regime had to eliminate them by firing squads or imprisonment.

The fact of the counter-revolution needs to be understood by the outside world, otherwise the whole Soviet story of these years is gibberish. Thousands of middle-class people who "found" the Russian Revolution belatedly preened themselves on their radicalism when, in fact, they had become reconciled to Russia precisely because it had ceased being revolutionary. Thousands of others, more honest but no less muddled, continued to support the Russian Revolution without recognizing that it had become the Russian Counter-revolution. They defended a memory, too precious for their peace of mind to be re-

linquished despite the piled-up evidence that it no longer existed.

The detailed story of Stalin's liquidation of the revolution is beyond the scope of this modest volume. I can merely indicate its larger and more obvious features.

To begin with, there was a far-reaching revival of nationalism in the crudest, most chauvinistic meaning of the term. The concepts of fatherland, holy native soil, sacred national history, were not merely revived. In some respects they were newly created, since patriotism in the Western sense had never been deeply rooted in Russia. The standard national heroes were dusted off and put again on pedestals. Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, even the legendary Prince Vladimir who brought Christianity to the Russians, were installed in the Soviet pantheon. Each of them in his way was reinterpreted as a precursor of one greater destined to come in the shape of Stalin.

Demian Biedny, a writer of banal political verse, had for years been the court poet of the Kremlin, which is sufficient commentary on Stalin's poetic taste. In 1934 he wrote a satirical musical comedy, some of the episodes in which were anti-religious. The legendary Vladimir, among others, came in for some rough ribbing. The show was ordered off the boards as a slight on glorious Russian tradition.

Upon instructions from the center of authority, folk lore and folk music were revived. The gaze of the people was directed to the past, to the peculiarities of Russian genius. Despite differences in trimming, the phenomenon was closely parallel to the nationalism rampant in Italy and particularly in Germany.



Bolsheviks of the earlier days, including Stalin himself at the time, would have been outraged by being compared with Peter the Great. The Czars were then tyrants whose yoke the people had thrown off. Now, however, Peter was consciously restored to favor and depicted as the Stalin of his day. A film version of Peter's career drew the parallel frankly and crudely. Even Peter's capacity for blood-letting was candidly glorified as a justification of Stalin's "firmness." The building of St. Petersburg on the Neva marshes with conscripted and terrorized labor was treated as foreshadowing the greater construction of cities and canals and railroads with forced labor by the Twentieth Century Peter who calls himself Comrade. Surveying his city built on the flesh and bones of a hundred thousand peasants, Peter in the Soviet film exclaims: "I have come through tears and blood—but all for Holy Mother Russia!" And Stalin's subjects are expected to applaud the sentiment.

The vision of an all-Bolshevik world was not given up. It was merely changed to mean an all-Russian world, or at least a world order centered in the Kremlin. At a critical moment in international affairs, on the threshold of a new World War, Stalin's ambassador in London, Ivan Maisky, said to the English: "We are not sentimentalists like you. We are thinking only of Russia, not of humanity." In his awkward fashion he was conveying a basic truth about the counter-revolution.

Where Lenin plotted to extend communism through the world, his successor schemes to extend Russian dominion, though he still rationalizes it for his followers in pseudo-revolutionary phrases. Lenin, who made the Rus-

sian Revolution, played with the idea of a single world-wide state, whose capital might as readily be Paris or Tokyo or New York as Moscow. He was eager to sink his native land in a communist supnation. Stalin, who captured that revolution from its makers, plays with the idea of a Russian empire rather than a Utopian inter-nation. Its capital must be Moscow, its character Muscovite.

The new nationalism put its stamp on all thinking and living in Stalin's Russia. In the narrower sense it was intended as a preparation against the war threatened by Hitler on one side and Japan on the other. The less the masses had to defend in fact, the more they must be given to defend in spirit, emotionally. Sacrifice for the world proletariat could have an appeal only if genuine proletarian ascendancy existed inside Russia. It was worthless as a goad to action when Stalin's subjects were more concerned with escaping their Soviet life than visiting it on others. Deeper, more traditional feelings had to be aroused and nationalist appeal was the most obvious recourse.

In a broader sense, this nationalism was the natural consequence of Stalin's victory over Trotsky, of the victory of the provincials over the "Westerners," the "Europeans," the "Frenchified internationalists." I remarked in a preceding chapter that it amounted to the triumph of Peter the Great over Karl Marx. Now literally, with every year, the image of Peter displaced the image of Marx. A Georgian became the incarnation of Russian nationalism, even as an Italian from Corsica had once embodied French nationalism, and an Austrian today leads German nationalism.

In everyday life, too, there was a revulsion against the revolution, carefully encouraged by Stalin's bureaucracy. Russia retreated in a sort of panic of the spirit from everything "advanced," progressive, experimental. There was a desperate groping for the once-despised respectabilities. It expressed itself in such diverse forms as the revival of uniforms for janitors and the restoration of titles for Red Army officers; in gallantry toward women in street-cars and subsidies for large families; in bric-a-brac for the parlor and a return to classic models in literature. Female fripperies and cosmetic aids to sex appeal were not merely tolerated but encouraged, and Communist Youth leaders began hurriedly to tuck their shirt-tails into their trousers and to put on gaudy ties. True, there were not enough textiles for the revived uniforms, the restored fashions, and the rehabilitated neckties. True, Red commanders, having been decked out as Marshals, were soon enough executed without public trial. But the striving for old-fashioned respectability was there, in the most vulgar forms.

Once the Russian Revolution had connoted innovation in every sphere of life. Middle-class intellectuals in the non-Soviet world became enamored with the Soviet way of life less because of its Marxist pretensions than because of its cultural daring. Russia had come to mean free abortions, uninhibited relations between the sexes, the Blue Blouses, leaderless orchestras, constructivist theater, cigar-box architecture, a thousand other "advanced" ideas. Those in America and elsewhere who accounted themselves "enlightened" in any division of life, love, or literature veered toward the Kremlin under the delusion that Bolshevism was a new, more gloriously courageous

bohemianism. And there was a great deal of external defiance of old "bourgeois standards" in Russia to make the delusion convincing, everything from post-card divorces to the Meierhold Experimental Theater.

The truth is, of course, that the Russian people never did take wholeheartedly to modernism in morals and aesthetics. They fidgeted uncomfortably under the outlandish innovations, and secretly indulged in virtue. Only a thin layer of urban intellectuals, and a portion of the imitative youth were affected. The birth rate kept rising despite free birth control clinics in department stores. The traditional theaters drew the audiences even when Meierhold and Tairov were drawing the Soviet headlines and official awards. Inside their ugly, boxlike new apartment houses the communists who could afford it put Alexander I mahogany furniture, Bokhara rugs and overstuffed divans. The crowds preferred American Westerns and slapstick pictures to the experimental cinema achievements of Pudovkin, Eisenstein and Dovzhenko.

But in the new Stalinist era the pretense of modernism was abandoned. Anything that smacked of experimentalism was outlawed as "bourgeois decadence." About the time that the modernist compositions of Shostakovich had reached Carnegie Hall in New York, they were outlawed by the Kremlin. Stalin said in so many words that he wanted music that could be whistled. The Meierhold Theater was closed down. Tairov was arrested. The Blue Blouses disappeared and the classic ballet again occupied first place in terpsichore. Divorce was made more difficult, and filial love was prescribed again for all good Soviet children. The experimental types of education which had

won acclaim from Prof. John Dewey and other foreign enthusiasts were thrown overboard for older educational disciplines. Gypsy music and ballroom dancing, accounted as capitalist abominations during the first Five Year Plan, were now restored to favor. Turgenyev and Dostoievsky and other classic writers were recognized as truly Russian, and deviation from established style became a species of disloyalty.

These are no more than random samples of the retreat from modernism. The mood of Soviet life changed. The color of adventure ran out of it. The reasons for the drift to conventionality are not hard to find. A new class was consolidating its gains, settling down to enjoy the fruits of its privileges. It had developed a stake in the *status quo*. The new ruling hierarchy—a few million police officials, bureaucrats, army men, more skilled workers, technicians—was sitting on the lid: is still sitting on the lid. It distrusts experiments and new ideas. It kills off agitators and dissenters. It lives on the exploitation of the mass of ordinary workers, the enslavement of the ordinary peasants. Deriving its power directly from Stalin, it obeys him implicitly and regards every threat against Stalin as a threat to its own security. Collectively the upper few million live on the fat of the land; thin enough fat, to be sure, but such things are relative. Like the ruling shift under any social system, they want a conservative, settled population that works hard, minds its own business, covets the rewards of efficiency, respects its betters and shuts its ears to trouble-mongers.

Stalin, at the head of this new class, deliberately made himself the champion of the restored conventions. He

staged a demonstrative visit to his aged mother in Tiflis. Little girls presented him with flowers while he smiled paternally and the cameramen ground away. Ten thousand scribblers and painters and sculptors were ordered to "humanize" the dictator. "Now life is happier," Stalin announced, and obediently the entire press and all radios brayed, "Thank you, Stalin, we are happy, happy, happy!" After the famine year of 1932-33 even a slight improvement in food supplies and availability of manufactured goods seemed a miracle, so that some of the braying for the "happy life" was genuine enough.

For a moment, indeed, it seemed as though the benevolence might be extended into the domain of political life. The name of the G.P.U. was changed to Commissariat of Internal Affairs, and hopes were raised that its terroristic methods would be curbed. A commission was designated, under the chairmanship of Stalin himself, to draft a new constitution—the "most democratic in the world." The fear of a Fascist onslaught and the need to win democratic allies abroad, as we shall see, had forced a new political line upon Stalin and his Communist International in foreign affairs. The hope was raised of liberalization of government policy inside Russia.

That hope failed dismally. Under its new name the G.P.U. entered upon the bloodiest phase of its career. The "world's most democratic constitution" turned out a dud—the comedy of compulsory "voting" for one list of hand-picked candidates fooled no one but weak-minded sentimental liberals in the United States and England. Two-thirds of the members of the commission which had

drafted the "democratic" constitution, in fact, soon fell before firing squads or were locked into "isolators." Stalin's bureaucracy shied away from the "humanist" and "democratic" changes, fearful that any real relaxation of the terror might cost them their privileged status.

The retreat from the revolution might have taken Russia a little closer to a voluntary, if not a democratic, type of political existence. Within the privileged groups around him there were timid suggestions for a relaxation of government by the knout. But Stalin dared not trust these groups, let alone the wider population, and probably he was right, from his own viewpoint. Millions were herded in the concentration camps. There was scarcely a peasant home in the vast Russian land which had not suffered directly through man-made famine, forcible collectivization or one of the manifold death decrees. In the Army, the Navy, the communist leadership, the ravages of Stalin's police had left festering resentments. Against such a background, liberalism might have spelled political suicide for the Stalinist bureaucracy.

It is open to serious doubt whether Stalin himself actually contemplated the liberalizing reforms that he permitted to be dangled before the eyes of the country. It is more likely that he merely pretended an interest in the idea, to dull the sharp edge of discontent brought on by the Great Wretchedness of the preceding years. In practice he did not for a single hour relinquish the instrumentalities of naked force. The retreat from revolution was real enough, but in the direction of Asiatic despotism.

Let me recapitulate: A cocksure chauvinistic nationalism was stimulated by all the tricks known to propaganda. The influence of the Communist Party (a mass organization and therefore related, however faintly, to the common man) was wiped out. A centralized police regime, wholly dependent on an individual dictator, absorbed all the functions of the party. Everything "advanced" in the realm of ideas, art and everyday life was renounced and ridiculed. Even the empty forms of workers' participation in the conduct of their jobs were eliminated in the name of efficiency. Economic equalitarianism was rejected not only in practice but even as a social ideal—stratification of new social categories was promoted through "Stakhanovist" speed-up systems and other devices. While the "socialist" names remained, they were redefined to conform with the anti-socialist facts.

Such, in its broadest outlines, was the Stalinist counter-revolution. Had some outsider, let us say a military Napoleon, seized control and made the changes which Stalin made, the fact would have been obvious to the whole world. But the counter-revolution was carried through from the inside, in the name of Lenin, under revolutionary slogans. There was continuity of regime and phraseology that concealed from superficial observers the profound revision of the revolution, amounting in most departments of Soviet life to a complete repudiation of earlier purposes. Therefore the world remains strangely unaware that the original revolution has long ago been liquidated and that in its place is a caricature with only a grotesque resemblance to the



dream that inspired it.

But it need not be thought that the counter-revolution was bloodless. The blood-letting was camouflaged, and spilled self-righteously in the name of the very dream it betrayed. Stalin and his associates of the moment were in fact conducting a relentless civil war against the Russian people, against the communists, against the officers' corps of the armed forces.

Stalin's strategy, now as throughout his career, was to conquer the oppositions piece-meal, purging now one group, now another. He used the G.P.U., headed by the sadistic and unprincipled Henry Yagoda, to crush recalcitrant or even potentially recalcitrant elements among the communists—and in the end would purge the G.P.U. itself, including Yagoda. Continuously he shifted the personnel of the government, the party, the economic institutions, thus keeping the "haves" in a continual panic of fear and the "have-nots" in a continual frenzy of hope and inflamed ambition.

Having weakened resistance, he was ready for the final job of expunging physically all those who doubted his greatness, who harbored lingering allegiances to the revolutionary past, and who might conceivably become rallying points for some future rebellion against his absolutism. He was ready for those four years of butchery which make all other celebrated political terrors of modern times seem restrained by contrast. From December 1934 forward Russia became a great slaughter-house.

## XXIII

### THE GREAT CARNAGE

ONE OF STALIN'S LEADING HENCHMEN, Sergei M. Kirov, sub-dictator of the Leningrad district, was shot to death in his office by a young communist named Niko-layev, on December 1, 1934. No crime in recorded history has been more hysterically avenged. The word "purge" was raised to a new dimension of horror, and Stalin leaped to first place among the bloodiest rulers in the memory of mankind.

More than a hundred political prisoners in no wise connected with the assassination were immediately pulled out of various prisons and put to death. The assassin himself and thirteen others were executed at the end of the month after a summary and secret trial. These, however, were only the start of what grew in the next few years into a mountain of corpses. The initial announcements in regard to the Kirov murder had implied that the young man had been the tool of foreign governments. There were references to Kirov as the victim of a "White Guard conspiracy." But soon the affair was expanded, the foreign ramifications were subordinated, and the whole thing transformed into an inner-party matter.

Zinoviev, Kamenev and ninety-five other formerly notable Bolsheviks were rounded up from their prisons,

places of banishment or obscure jobs and convicted of "moral responsibility" for the dissident moods which had resulted in the assassination. Ultimately all but a few of these were re-tried and condemned to death, or finished off without the formality of a trial. Along with them went practically all the remaining founders of the Soviet state.

But that was not all. The new terror unloosed by the death of Kirov set off a series of linked accusations that served the Stalin regime as excuse for killing off literally tens of thousands of communists. Each batch, before being hauled off to the slaughter-houses, inculcated another batch, and thus endlessly forged the chain of death. The official blood lust did not limit itself to the political domain. It ferreted out real or imaginary or merely potential enemies of Stalin in the Army, the Navy, the air force, destroying nearly the whole of the Higher Command. Some 30,000 officers, two-thirds of the higher officers' corps, were "liquidated" by death, incarceration or exile before the orgy was over. The terror executed or drove to suicide the heads of nearly all the so-called "autonomous republics." It destroyed all but three or four of the outstanding Soviet diplomats. Among the executed or "missing" were the men who made the Five Year Plans and those who, according to the official legend, carried them through "triumphantly." Industrial directors, famous scientists, great writers and critics—all, all officially murdered or hounded to self-destruction or mysteriously missing.

To cap the obscene climax, the ranks of the executioners themselves have been cut down by the sickle of



#### STALIN AND KIROV

Photograph, taken in Tiflis in summer of 1934, and hitherto unpublished, shows Sergei Kirlov (extreme left) a few months before his assassination. At extreme right: Sergei Ordzhonikidze.



terror. The highest officials of the G.P.U., including the chief architect of Stalin's torture system, Yagoda, fell before the firing squads. A new head of the Secret Service, Nikolai Yezhov, was put in charge of the carnage in its later stages, and himself "disappeared" after he had dispatched several dozens of thousands to eternity and several hundreds of thousands to concentration camps.

Foreign correspondents during these years calculated more than five thousand executions announced in the press. They could count only a fraction of the announcements, since many death verdicts were recorded obscurely in provincial papers. Besides, I know from personal experience in gathering such facts during six years of residence in Russia that for every execution reported in the press, dozens and scores are never reported at all. Only when there is a good political reason for taking the public into confidence are announcements of capital verdicts made. An estimate of forty to fifty thousand executions in the great Stalinist slaughter consequently gives the Kremlin the benefit of a broad margin of doubt.

The cold-blooded listing of names and statistics conveys little of the tragedy. Wholesale butchery was merely the common denominator in enormities that compassed the humiliation of once-great men and women, a mighty wave of suicides, moral degradations so awful that the civilized world still cannot credit the testimony of its own eyes and ears. Systematically Stalin besmirched the records of those who had led the revolution, achieved the victories of the civil wars, made the Five Year Plans.

He turned them all into "mad dogs," spies for foreign Intelligence Services, actual or would-be assassins. If one-hundredth part of Stalin's charges were true, the Russian Revolution would be one of the filthiest enterprises in human history. In his lust for vengeance, the new master of Russia sought to deny the original revolution any claim to decency, let alone idealism.

Not content with taking their lives and reputations, he forced dozens of the leading victims to make public "confessions" of their imaginary crimes and to grovel in the mud at his feet. In a series of demonstration trials the Fathers of the Revolution called themselves dirty names, admitted incredible and physically impossible and mutually exclusive betrayals of their own life's work, and glorified the name of the man who was putting them through those macabre antics. Nothing comparable, on this scale, can be discovered in the whole record of mankind's travail.

The virtual counter-revolution that preceded the purge, that intensified as the purge gained momentum, is the frame within which the fantastic orgy of slaughter must be placed to be comprehended. But there is an inner, narrower frame of more immediate political developments that needs to be traced, however briefly.

Lenin, on his death-bed, had warned the party leaders to avoid the fatal mistake of the Jacobins in the French Revolution who destroyed one another. Until the end of 1934 it was accepted as axiomatic that no important Bolshevik, whatever his political sins, could be subjected to capital punishment. There had been a

few grim exceptions to the rule, but they involved relatively minor communists and extraordinary circumstances. For example, one Blumkin, a G.P.U. agent sent to watch over Trotsky had been converted by him instead; when Blumkin returned to Russia he carried a confidential letter to Karl Radek. Radek promptly denounced the messenger to the G.P.U. and Blumkin was executed. In 1932 Stalin had spoken up in the Politburo for the execution of Riutin, when the scandal of the Riutin "program" broke. But the suggestion seemed so outrageous that Stalin did not push it.

Kirov, in particular, was opposed to violating Lenin's commandment on this matter. Increasingly, indeed, Kirov became the spokesman within the uppermost circles of power for moderation inside the party. Nor that he was in the slightest measure a sentimentalist. He had been among the most ruthless in the years of super-industrialization, liquidation of kulaks and political terror, and hand-picked by Stalin as boss of Leningrad. The largest forced-labor camps, in Karelia, were under his direct supervision. Kirov's advocacy of "reconciliation" of formerly hostile communists, and a softening of the terror all along the line, came less from the heart than from the mind. He came to believe that the Stalinist dictatorship had nothing more to fear and might even strengthen its hold if it modified its methods.

In this view Kirov was reflecting an immense body of sentiment among the communist leaders. Their attitude found practical support in the need for winning over "democratic" opinion abroad as a counterweight to Hitler's anti-Soviet bluster. Without committing him-



self, Stalin permitted this tendency to grow. Again and again it came to grips with the irreconcilable terrorists, particularly functionaries in Stalin's immediate circle, who deprecated the "softness." Kirov had the support of Maxim Gorki, the great novelist, who for years had been patronized by Stalin. It was their contention that the most difficult years were over, and the road to safety for the rulers was to get closer to the people, to "broaden the base" of their power.

Discontents were rife everywhere. Among young people in the large cities it was finding expression in vague allusions to "acts of heroism," a new interest in the revolutionary heroes of the terrorist underground movements in the period of Czarism. Wherever discovered, young people's clubs or even tea parties were brutally exterminated. But Kirov and those who supported him came to believe that only a moderation of the Kremlin terror could head off more serious developments. His popularity among communists "in the know" grew. At a Party Congress in February 1934 he was cheered almost as lustily as Stalin himself.

The joyous anticipation of "easier times" rippled through the communist rank-and-file and even touched the mood of the whole country. A new affability on Stalin's part, his talk of the "happy life" and his more frequent smiles, enabled millions to lift their heads a little higher. Such is the power of Stalin that the precise degree of his smile or frown was a matter of the greatest political significance! The talk of a "new course," of a democratic constitution, seemed to find confirmation

in more tolerance for former Oppositionists, a few of whom were allowed to return and given important jobs. The circumstance that this coincided with some measure of economic improvement encouraged the optimistic mood. Kirov himself was scheduled to transfer his activity from Leningrad to the larger sphere of Moscow.

Just when the mood of conciliation was at its peak, Kirov was assassinated. Within a few weeks not a trace of that mood remained. The pendulum swung to the opposite extreme. It was as though Stalin had waited for the signal to erase all the delusions of liberalism. He rushed to Leningrad and took personal charge of the investigations. All those who had prattled about "reconciliation" and "broader bases for the power" and democratic constitutions now outshouted the rest in demanding extermination of "the enemy," vengeance against Oppositionists.

To this day the truth about Nikolayev's revolver-shot—the shot that spelled death to tens of thousands—is hidden in mystery. The young communist was a nervous, unstable person. He had recorded his thoughts for several years in a diary, selected passages from which did become known to insiders in the Kremlin. The entire diary, if ever it is dug out of the archives by Stalin's successors, may provide an enlightening picture of the mind of Soviet youth in the era of the great wretchedness. The only thing now known is that Nikolayev acted alone, whatever the "moral" influences to which he was subject. The idea of martyrdom, of a heroic act

to "awaken" Russia to a sense of the prevailing injustice, was close to the surface of his mind. He was a perfect instrument for stronger men.

The most significant fact that emerged quickly as Stalin's secret investigation proceeded was this: that the Leningrad G.P.U., whose chief job it was to guard Kirov's life, *was fully aware of young Nikolayev's thoughts*. In his confusion and weakness Nikolayev had said enough in the hearing of the ubiquitous informers to make himself a marked man. Yet he not only remained at large, but had work which gave him access to the Smolny, where Kirov and other leaders had their offices. Such "negligence" is not easy to explain in a country where hundreds of thousands with less against them were being exiled. On January 23, 1935, twelve leading functionaries of the Leningrad G.P.U. were brought to trial for this negligence. The official act of accusation said that their organization had failed to prevent the assassination "although it had every possible means to avert it." *But the punishments meted out to these officials were startlingly light.*

In later trials the commander-in-chief of the Secret Service, Yagoda himself, "confessed" that he had plotted the murder of Kirov. Nikolayev had been left in freedom and given access to the Smolny in order that he might achieve the martyrdom he craved. How much of this confession was true? Since Yagoda at the time was still Stalin's creature, how much did Stalin have to do with leaving the road clear for the elimination of the man who was acquiring an influence and following of such great proportions?

No hard-and-fast answers can be given. The only certainty is that those close to Stalin in Moscow who opposed the Kirov policies of moderation now found themselves in the saddle. If, as the *Letter of an Old Bolshevik* insists, there was a desperate competition for influence over Stalin, the assassination was remarkably convenient for those who feared the reforms advocated by Kirov and Gorki. Whether they had the tacit encouragement of Stalin or forced Stalin's hand it is impossible to say.

One of them, Nikolai Yezhov, influential in the Stalin circle but totally unknown to the general public, soon displaced Yagoda as head of the G.P.U. Yagoda still organized the first two demonstration trials against Lenin's closest associates. Yezhov organized the rest—including the execution of Yagoda—and the larger purge through all layers of the population in the following years. Having done this job he disappeared as suddenly as he had emerged. But his name will be forever linked with this extraordinary official slaughter. As Stalin's principal tool, he has a permanent place in Stalin's biography. Here is what the *Letter* has to say about him:

"In the whole of my long life, I have never encountered a more repellent personality than Yezhov's. When I look at him I am reminded irresistibly of the wicked urchins of the courts of Rasterayeva Street, whose favorite occupation was to tie a piece of paper dipped in paraffin to a cat's tail, set fire to it, and then watch with delight how the terrified animal would tear down the street, trying desperately but in vain to escape the approaching flame. I do not doubt that in his childhood

Yezhov amused himself in just such manner, and that he is now continuing to do so in different forms. It is only necessary to observe with what ecstasy he badgers old Oppositionists, whenever he has a chance. It seems that for a long time Yezhov had found it difficult to make his way in the party. He was disliked and despised. A great store of bitterness had accumulated in his soul against all those who had formerly occupied prominent posts in the party—against intellectuals who were good speakers (he himself is a poor orator), against writers whose books achieved popularity (he himself could never write anything but informers' reports), against old revolutionists proud of their past (he himself had never worked in the underground movement). No man could be more fit to function in this period, when the persecution of Old Bolsheviks has become the official slogan of the 'rejuvenated' Bolshevik Party. The only talent with which nature has abundantly endowed him is his talent for intrigue behind the scenes. And he misses no opportunity to use this talent."

Except for the detail that he did not participate in the pre-revolutionary underground movement, having been too young at the time, this description of Yezhov is a perfect characterization, no less, of Stalin! After the dismissal of Yezhov, Stalin brought in a fellow-Georgian, Lavrenti Beria, as his successor. No one has as yet depicted this Beria for posterity. But I have heard him discussed by persons who knew him, and can attest that Beria, too, is the Yezhov-Stalin type, though better educated. At this writing, Beria is closer to Stalin and more

trusted than any other man in his entourage. It is even said that Stalin purposely selected a Russian to carry through the purges and installed a fellow-Caucasian immediately afterwards to mark the decline of the purge.

## XXIV

### THE TREASON TRIALS

OF THE CUMULATIVE HORROR of the purge years the outside world saw only a few carefully staged shadow-shows in the highly publicized demonstration trials. It saw men with records of revolutionary heroism, great economists and political leaders, reduced to stuttering imbecility. It heard them denounce themselves and each other in a spectacle unrelieved by a single episode of courage or self-respect or moral decency.

Hardened criminals behave more nobly on the threshold of death. The tradition in which these men spent their younger years was rich with examples of defiance in the face of hopeless odds, contempt for death. What were the terrible pressures which had crushed the spirits of these men? The question of innocence or guilt does not enter into the problem. Indeed, if they were guilty of the complicated abominations to which they confessed, it becomes even more difficult to understand why they did not attempt to explain or justify their crimes.

Only the assumption that they were lying can explain their failure to provide half-way logical motivations for their supposed criminality. If their confessed "crimes" had been limited to the recent years, disappointment with the course of the revolution or resentments against

their own elimination from power might conceivably provide motives for their alleged espionage. But the "crimes" dated back to the very inception of the revolution—and in a few cases even beyond that. Why would men who had devoted their youth and early manhood to a cause, had suffered and risked their lives for it, sell it out to foreign governments in the very first years of the triumph of the cause? The verbatim records of the trials give no clue. Only the theory that the whole story was a fabulous police fabrication, to which the victims, for reasons not yet known, lent themselves, brings any coherence into the mystery. How were creatures who had once been men of exceptional physical courage and moral robustness been converted into such repulsive weaklings?

I do not know the answer. The answer will not be known until the truth about what transpired in the months and years when they were being "interrogated" in solitary confinement is revealed to the world, if ever. Unquestionably threats against their families played a part in the brutal comedy. The system of "hostages" had been introduced by Lenin and Trotsky under different circumstances, but had become standard procedure in their country. A technique for breaking down men's moral fiber, reducing them to blabbing idiocy, had been developed by the G.P.U. third-degree artists. The mysticism surrounding "the party" and justifying even moral self-abuse and moral suicide doubtless was also a factor.

It should be remembered, too, that most of the victims had repeatedly "admitted error" in the preceding



ten years. Difficult as the initial self-abasement may have been for a Zinoviev or Bukharin, the second and the third came more easily. The moral atmosphere of Bolshevism was tainted from the beginning by its utilitarian ethics of noble ends as justification for ignoble means. That atmosphere became more and more polluted, as this ethical precept, first applied against class enemies, next was applied against the whole Russian people, and soon found its widest and most devastating application within the party itself. In the impassioned lying *against themselves*, in these show trials, the pollution reached the pestilential state—the utilitarian principle went stark mad, turning perversely against itself. It was gruesome and unreal: as though a tool were to turn angrily on the hand that wields it. The “defendants” came to the stage with decades of principled amorality behind them. When we recognize their “confessions” as the climax of a long process, not as sudden and exceptional phenomena, they are easier to understand.

“In former times,” writes the aforementioned Old Bolshevik, “we ‘politicals’ used to observe a moral code in our relations with the rulers. It was regarded as a crime to petition for clemency. Anyone who did this was finished politically. . . . There is quite a different psychology nowadays. To plead for pardon has become a common phenomenon, on the supposition that the party in power being ‘my party,’ the rules which applied in the Czarist days are no longer valid. At the same time it is considered quite proper to consistently deceive ‘my party,’ since the party does not fight its intellectual opponents by trying to convince them, but by the use of

force. This has given rise to a special type of morality, which allows one to accept any conditions, to sign any undertakings, with the premeditated intention not to observe them. . . . This new morality has had a very demoralizing effect inside the ranks of the Oppositionists. The border line between what is and what is not admissible has become completely obliterated, and many have fallen to downright treachery and disloyalty."

There we have, it seems to me, the ultimate argument against utilitarian ethics. Such "free will" in the moral domain begets chaos. It amounts to throwing away the compass on the ground that compasses are not God-given principles but man-made gadgets to which man must not "enslave" himself. Those who defend the Bolshevik amoralism—as Trotsky still does—confound two things. They demonstrate convincingly that moral concepts are the end-products of economic and social forces and needs, rather than eternal and absolute notions. Then they proceed to *anticipate* historical processes by making their own moral concepts, each on the basis of his own guess, which means, in the final analysis, in line with his private interests and appetites. It is as though, believing in biological evolution, each of us assumed the right to anticipate the process by lopping off portions of our own or our neighbors' anatomy. Insane? But it was precisely that type of insanity, on the ethical plane, that the amoralists let themselves in for. It was then inevitable that the most ruthless in lopping off heads "for the cause," the most diabolically shrewd in exploiting the moral chaos, should come out on top. And Stalin did come out on top. These horrifying demonstration trials,

in a sense, dramatized the reasons for his triumph over abler, more intelligent, and—despite the handicap of their amorality—nobler men. Those who understand the innermost meaning of these trials understand the ascendancy of Stalin.

In an earlier trial of Zinoviev, Kamenev and others they were told that “the party demanded their help” in a struggle against terroristic moods among young communists. They must “sacrifice themselves politically” by publicly assuming responsibility for those moods. It was their “duty to the party” to head off this danger by pretending to expose the terroristic sentiment as the work of spies and saboteurs for Fascists. Having consented to do this, the bigger lies of the final trial seemed less monstrous to themselves than to outsiders—indeed, to many it seemed not monstrous at all but a magnificent final service to the cause. They were sacrificing far more than life, sacrificing honor and reputation and self-respect for “the party.”

This moral confusion was not only in itself a method of obtaining “confessions,” but made all other pressures a thousand times more effective. But whatever the methods, they worked. Only this must be said in defense of the honor of the Old Bolsheviks, and thousands of new ones who died at Stalin’s behest: For every one who lent himself to public ceremonies of humiliation and self-accusation, hundreds died bravely beyond closed doors, refusing to play the obscene role. Not one of the executed Marshals and Generals and Admirals made public confession. Hundreds of prominent associates of Lenin ended their lives with their own hands, or were shot

secretly. Obviously they had refused to play Stalin's nightmarish game of show trials.

In the first of the Old Bolshevik treason trials, Stalin and Yagoda put on view Zinoviev and Kamenev, the two men closest to Lenin in his European years. With them were great figures from the Bolshevik story like Yevdokimov, Ivan Smirnov, Mrachkovsky, Ter-Vaganyan. The second of the great demonstration performances, in January 1937, brought before the microphones and into the arclights men like Serebriakov, who had been a secretary of the party along with Stalin; Piatakov, Sokolnikov, Radek, Boguslavsky, Muralov, Drobnis. All of them elaborated the repetitious fairy tale of espionage, sabotage, terrorism, not merely as applying to recent years but reaching back to the heroic phase of the revolution and before that.

It is revealing that their "confessions," while implicating Germany, Italy and Japan, did not involve the Western democracies. Though many of their "crimes" pre-dated the Hitler and even the Mussolini periods, they had, with extraordinary prescience of the political needs of 1936-37, carefully sinned only with Hitler's and Mussolini's countries. But by the time the third of these major trials came up, in March 1938, the international picture had begun to change. Anthony Eden had been removed by Chamberlain and the Anglo-French policy of appeasement was taking sharper form. A hankering to divert the Hitler-Mussolini aggressiveness toward the Soviet East was manifest in the ruling circles of the Western democracies. And miraculously the new batch of show-trial actors, with no less remarkable forethought,

had sinned conveniently with England as well as the Fascist nations!

It is such a crude reconditioning of past crime to suit current policy needs that repeatedly gave away the secret of the whole revolting business.

The outstanding figures in this third trial were Bukharin, next to Lenin the greatest theorist of the revolution; ex-Premier Alexei Rykov; Yagoda, for a decade the "flaming sword" of the Kremlin as head of the Secret Service; Nikolai Krestinsky, Stalin's predecessor as Secretary of the Party, long the Soviet Ambassador in Germany and at the time of his arrest Assistant Commissar of Foreign Affairs; Christian Rakovsky, once head of Soviet Ukraine and later Ambassador to France and England; the Commissar of Foreign Trade, A. P. Rosenholtz; the Commissar of Finance, G. F. Grinko. With them were other Old Bolsheviks and for good measure, also two of Russia's leading physicians. Besides the routine of espionage and sabotage, this trial unfolded a melodrama of slow poisoning of which Maxim Gorki, Commissar Kuibishev, and others were allegedly the victims.

Only four, in all these trials, were allowed to live. The others were shot within a day or two after the curtain went down on the demonstrations. In between, and afterwards, the country and the gaping world were treated to announcement of the "liquidation" of eight generals in one clip, among them Marshal Tukhachevsky, foremost Soviet strategist. Their death warrant was signed by a group of other generals—nearly all of whom in turn were executed afterwards. Suicide accounted for Tom-

sky, long head of the trade unions; for Gamarnik, an Assistant Commissar of War; for several of the Presidents of autonomous Soviet Republics. Execution without trial ended Abel Yenukidze, a childhood friend of Stalin and one of his few intimates until the very day of his disgrace; Karakhan, the Armenian who was long Assistant Commissar of Foreign Affairs and at the end Ambassador to Turkey; Budu Mdivani, another of Stalin's boyhood associates; hundreds of others.

Only those sufficiently familiar with Soviet history to recognize such names savor the full horror of the protracted butchery.

Thus the Caucasian brigand chief cleaned the slate. From denunciation of fellow-students in a Tiflis seminary to mass murder of fellow-revolutionaries—and now, as then, “for the cause.” No one capable of displacing him has been left alive inside Russia. The toll of life exacted from his enemies by Ivan the Terrible or Peter the Great dwindles to the negligible against the toll exacted by Stalin. Whether the G.P.U. permitted the assassination of Kirov with Stalin's consent or without it, responsibility for the political crime so extravagantly avenged rests on the head of the avenger himself. The G.P.U. was his tool. Having obliterated the basic ideas, realities and idealism of the revolution, he needed to expunge the men who had once advocated those ideas, initiated those realities and lived by that idealism. In dictatorship, as in racketeering, there is no easy “out” for the losers—they are put on the spot and rubbed out.

Perhaps Stalin's greatest crime, in the view of history,

will be that he destroyed all those who, in a time of crisis, might have provided leadership. Should a collapse of his regime occur under the pressures of the war he helped to start, there will be no one within Russia whose name and record might serve as rallying points. By his continuous extermination of the more intelligent, the more courageous, the more idealistic groups in the ruling party and its periphery Stalin has made it likely that a fall of his regime will bring only incalculable chaos. There will be no one with the moral prestige to save the pieces of the revolution.

Those who remain in the Kremlin and in the vast bureaucracy are men totally devoid of European or cultural background. They glory in their contempt for those "bourgeois" values. They are hard-boiled, strong-arm types, who accept the dictum that force is the final arbiter in life. They are men like Zhdanov, Kirov's successor as boss of Leningrad, and Beria: crude, tough, "strong" men. Zhdanov, who is often mentioned as possible successor to Stalin, has made no secret of his hate for Europe and its ways. Beria, who has already edged out Zhdanov for the succession, is a Caucasian like Stalin, and lacks even Stalin's early memories of self-sacrificing activity. Either of them would be another, no less brutal Stalin.

The temper of the leadership is reflected throughout the machine that has the country in its grip. Everywhere the more humane and altruistic communists and non-communist officials have been displaced by "strong" men, coarse and power-drunk. The tragedy of a Stalin at the head of a government is that he inevitably begets a million lesser Stalins, each inflicting his petty greatness and

his brutality on some section of the people under his control.

The high mortality rate among those in the seats of the favored makes even the most elevated position near Stalin dangerous. Those close to him now are aware that every one of his former favorites is now a corpse. In his supreme single control, Stalin is yet a lone, friendless man. One can't help wondering whether he finds obedience and fear sufficient compensations. Perhaps the new purges, the new proofs of his omnipotence, are his vindictive answer to that human isolation.

Stalin has wreaked his vengeance on the revolution which used him as a "hall sweeper." He has had his revenge on the Russia which he learned to hate while still at his mother's breast. He has kicked and humiliated the European ideas—every notion of humanism and democracy and the nobility of the individual life. By killing off those who were the most trusted and admired in Lenin's immediate circle, he has in fact slaked an implacable vengeance on Lenin himself. The leader whose dying wish it was to save Russia from Stalin was removed by death from Stalin's avenging hand. But his associates remained. His *Testament* remained. His ideas remained. All these Stalin has violated systematically, adding a poignant sauce to his dish of vengeance by doing it in Lenin's name.

In the future, when the archives of his period are open to scholars, Stalin's biography will be written finally and logically, but not by historians or journalists. It will be written by psychiatrists. They will find more clues to his bloody reign in a warped mind than in all the theories of Marx or Lenin.



## XXV

### FOREIGN POLICIES

SELF-PRESERVATION IS THE FIRST law of nature, for political regimes no less than for individuals. In its first period, Soviet Russia regarded itself as the nucleus of a world revolution, doomed unless that revolution got under way. It is no reflection on the sincerity of the first generation of leaders to recognize that a revolutionary Europe and Asia seemed to offer the only chance of survival to Lenin's new state. He attested the fact continually himself. Under the sacrificial zeal of the Russians for the liberation of the enslaved non-Russians was the conviction that without allies beyond its own frontiers the new Russia might perish.

And in fact, revolutionary sentiment and upheaval in the Western world did help the new Russia to survive. "The Soviet power could not have held out for twelve months without the direct help of the international, and especially the European, proletariat," Trotsky has written. The opposition of liberal and labor groups in their own countries to the Allies' and America's intervention helped to defeat it. Fear of revolutionary outbreaks at home, seamen's boycotts, liberal agitation in favor of the struggling revolution gave the intervention a half-illicit character and in the long run disarmed it.

After Lenin's death, when Stalin became the most in-

fluent leader though not yet the sole dictator, the Kremlin intensified a phase of collaboration with non-communists abroad started even earlier. This "Second Period" in Soviet foreign affairs aimed to consolidate Russia's position by winning political recognition from capitalist nations and active support from Left and labor elements. The growing ascendancy of Stalin's slogan of "socialism in one country" provided a theoretical justification for the policy. It was in this period that the fiction of a separation between the Soviet government and the communist movement was most earnestly propagated. It enabled the Soviet state to work with other states as a first line of defense of its regime, while the Communist International held the second line, the threat of renewed revolutionary agitation, should a retreat be necessary.

This Second Period was marked by ill-starred communist co-operation with an Anglo-Russian Committee in England, with LaFollette and Farmer-Labor progressivism in the United States, with the Kuomintang in China. The Chinese adventure ended in mass butchery of communists. Chiang Kai-shek destroyed the militant trade unions, literally strangled the communist leaders and murdered thousands of their followers. It remains the most disastrous and disgraceful defeat in Stalin's career. Knowing what we do of his stubborn memory and calculated patience in matters of revenge, it is safe to assume that to this day Stalin nurtures a dream of retribution for Chiang Kai-shek. At this writing the Kremlin still provides a lackadaisical support to China against Japan. But the festering sore of the Kuomintang insult

of 1927-28 must not be forgotten in watching the further unfoldment of Stalinist policy in the Far East.

The next phase, the so-called "Third Period" in Soviet international affairs, was completely dominated by Stalin. Abroad, as at home, a furious Leftism was unloosed—to out-Trotsky Trotsky, to obliterate the stain of the consistent reverses of the mild Second Period. The 1928 congress of the Communist International, in Moscow, hurled inflammatory manifestoes in the face of the world, and especially in the face of the moderate socialists, laborites, reformers of the world. It indulged in promises of "inevitable world dictatorship of the proletariat." Out of this congress came the theory of "social Fascism," according to which the Social Democrats were really Fascist wolves in Marxist clothing and even more dangerous than the outright Fascists.

The practical effect of this extreme reversal was to split the labor and radical movements in all countries. At a time when Fascism was making enormous strides everywhere, and particularly in Germany, the Communist International under Stalin's control splintered the anti-Fascist forces and gave politicians of the Hitler ilk the right of way. Dual unions were launched everywhere by the communists to undermine the "reformist" unions. Every proffer of united action against Fascism was rejected. On the contrary, repeatedly the communists collaborated with the Nazis in Germany, for instance, against the "social Fascist" socialists.

But the mock-revolutionism, without logic or restraint, served excellently as a background for Stalin's counter-revolution at home. It diverted attention from reaction

inside Russia and provided a justification for the gigantic horrors of super-industrialization and super-collectivization. "Socialism" in Russia must be pushed at any cost in human life, because the whole world was about to revolt. At the very time that Hitler was rising to power, that Dollfuss was beating down the Austrian Social Democrats, that menacing nationalisms were spreading everywhere, Stalin assured his subjects that world revolution was around the corner. In 1930 he told a party gathering:

"This globe is mined with antagonisms, the most acute of which opposes the United States to England; the League of Nations is rotting on its feet; socialism is losing all influence and the Communist Parties are marching from victory to victory; the stabilization of capitalism is coming to an end and the revolution is rumbling everywhere; the bourgeoisie is looking for a way out in the war against the U.S.S.R., above all in France. . . ."

It is too simple to credit this grotesque version of affairs to Stalin's ignorance. It was calculated misrepresentation. He needed the threat of the war on the U.S.S.R. as well as the promise of world revolution as justification for his bloody course at home. The closer Germany came to a Fascist victory, the louder grew the International's hollow self-confidence. The German Republic, rather than Hitler, was held up as the "chief danger." Communists voted with Nazis in the Prussian Diet against the Republic. They might shoot one another in street brawls, but they worked together against their common enemy—"rotting democracy."

German communists at the time glibly discounted the

importance of Hitler, even if he did win. "After them, our turn," many of them told me confidentially at the time. The important thing was to break the growing understanding between the Republic and France, since France was plotting to attack Russia. Any Rightist regime in Germany would be militantly anti-Versailles and therefore more desirable. Besides, it would be only a stage toward the triumph of the communists. Listen to Comrade Remmele in the Reichstag on October 14, 1931. Once the Nazis are in power, he exclaimed, "then the united front of the proletariat will make a clean sweep of everything. . . . We are not afraid of the Fascist gentlemen. They will shoot their bolt quicker than any other government." ㄅ ㄅ 。

Indeed, fourteen months after Hitler the Soviet leaders were not yet cured of this mistake. In April 1934, the Comintern Presidium solemnly declared that the Nazi dictatorship "by destroying all the democratic illusions of the masses and liberating them from the influence of Social Democracy, accelerates the rate of Germany's development towards proletarian revolution."

Under these circumstances there seemed no reason why Russia should not play ball with this interregnum regime—if only it consented to play.

I was in Moscow during the first year of triumphant Hitlerism in Germany. The Nazi victory evoked as much satisfaction over the humbling of the Social Democrats and the destruction of the Republic as it did misgivings over the advent of German Fascism. The official attitude, which is to say Stalin's attitude, was that everything would turn out for the best if only he could come

to terms with the Austrian upstart. After all Hitler was anti-French, anti-League of Nations, anti-Versailles and anti-democratic—precisely like Stalin. With such a community of interests, mere ideological differences could be ironed out.

While the democratic press the world over thundered against anti-Semitic and other excesses in Nazi Germany in 1933-34, the Soviet press remained self-possessed. The Kremlin was determined to do nothing that might cause a breach with Germany. As late as January 1934, Stalin said at a Moscow conference:

"Of course we are far from being enthusiastic about the Fascist regime in Germany. But Fascism is not the issue here, if only for the reason that Fascism, for example in Italy, did not prevent the U.S.S.R. from establishing good relations with that country."

Thus he was leaving the door wide open for "very good relations" with Nazi Germany as well. Hitler seemed not unwilling, despite his demagogic fulminations against Bolshevism. His break with Russia was neither as abrupt nor as deeply concerned with ideologies as is generally supposed now that time has telescoped the memory of events. In his first address to a Nazi Reichstag, on March 21, 1933, Hitler announced his readiness to "foster friendly relations with the U.S.S.R." Six weeks later his government renewed a treaty of friendship with Russia which had lapsed since 1931. It provided for "whole-hearted co-operation" and for neutrality in the event of an attack by a third party.

Stalin's state was then at its lowest ebb. The catastrophic famine had weakened the country and under-

mined the morale of the people. Japanese militarism was rampant in the Far East, ready to attack the Maritime Provinces of Russia at the first sign of encouragement from Europe. If Herr Hitler's flamboyant anti-Bolshevik rhetoric were genuine, then was the time to join with Japan and to invite the capitalist West to do likewise in a crusade against the Soviets. Instead, Herr Hitler renewed German credits to Russia and signed a commercial pact with the Soviets.

The fact is that the Versailles Powers were his first hate. For nearly two years after his accession, sub-rosa military collaboration between Germany and Russia, under way since Rapallo, continued. In the end it was not Stalin—and this is important to an understanding of subsequent events—who broke the strange entente, but Hitler. The *Führer*, in his machiavellian fashion, had decided to bait the democratic West with sugar before trying poison. He set himself up as Europe's policeman against Bolshevik barbarism—at a price.

The upper classes in France and England were delighted with the turn of affairs. At first willingly, and then in despair, they paid Hitler's price for acting as a barrier against Bolshevism. For more than four years they paid and paid—by permitting Germany to rearm, to militarize the Rhineland, to build a West Wall, to seize Austria, Czechoslovakia, Memel. They were ready to pay him with colonies; probably with a slice of the Polish Corridor, if Hitler had played his cards more patiently. Ultimately, of course, they were forced to the reluctant realization that there must be a limit to the

blackmail or they would have to give up their own and not merely other people's possessions.

During the years immediately preceding Hitler's seizure of power, Russia was on more intimate terms with Italy than with any other European nation. True, routine attacks on Fascism as a doctrine appeared occasionally in the Soviet press, even as castigation of communism was routine in the Italian press. But Fascism as a functioning system in Italy, and Benito Mussolini personally, were treated with the utmost delicacy. At the time of the Matteoti murder in Rome, when the whole world assailed Mussolini, the Soviet Ambassador lunched with him, conspicuously. Differences in social philosophy counted for approximately nothing against the realities of trade and power politics. In the light of this fact, and Stalin's repeated allusions to Soviet-Italian friendship, the skepticism with which reports of the coming Nazi-Soviet rapprochement were met in the years before it came to pass is the more remarkable.

By 1934, in the recoil from Hitler's intransigent hatred for the Moscow system, Russia had entered the League of Nations—that League of Robber Nations, in Lenin's phrase, which was "rotting on its feet," in Stalin's phrase. By May 1935, a Franco-Russian military alliance had been initialed, soon buttressed with a supplementary Soviet-Czechoslovak pact. The Moscow rulers of a sudden discovered their affinities with bourgeois democracies, in effect declared a moratorium on class war, and undertook an intensive program of building People's



Front defenses everywhere against the Fascist beasts.

Nevertheless, the friendship with Mussolini was not hastily jettisoned. As late as 1935, with Hitler's regime more than two years old, Russia still fed the Italian Navy and Italian air bombers over Ethiopia with oil from the Caucasus, and many of the Italian planes sowing death in Spain even later were nourished with Soviet oil. The point to note here, too, is that it was not Stalin who broke Soviet-Italian friendship, but Mussolini, as part of the price exacted by Hitler for the (Rome-Berlin Axis)

In adopting an anti-Fascist "democratic" line in foreign affairs, thus ending the Third Period and inaugurating the amazing Fourth Period of united and popular and people's fronts, Stalin was not a free agent. He was driven to it by the other two dictators and the militancy of Japan's anti-Sovietism. It should be recalled that Japan made experimental forays against Russia on the Amur River before it launched its attack on China proper. The flirtation with "putrescent democracies" could not conceivably have been less than hateful to a man of Stalin's temper.

The efforts to escape from this hateful position, it is now clear, did not cease with the adoption of the "democratic" line. While seeking military insurance against the threat of the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis in alliances with the democracies, the Kremlin continued to feel its way toward its natural dictatorial allies. Many tales out of school have recently been told by Bolsheviks who succeeded in fleeing the great Stalinist carnage. More obscurely but no less significantly, these tales have also

been told by victims of the carnage before they died.

Walter Krivitzky, a high official of Stalin's Military Intelligence, after breaking with Moscow, wrote extensively in the French press, even before he repeated his story in the American press. "And still we must come to an understanding with the Germans," he quoted Stalin as saying at Politburo meetings on the very edge of the Franco-Russian pact. In fact, "the rapprochement with France was viewed by Stalin as a means of strengthening his position in the expected negotiations with Hitler, who was given to understand—officially and unofficially—that Stalin is very much in earnest about a Soviet-Nazi deal."

There has also been some tale-telling out of the Nazi school. Elizabeth Knaust, for years a trusted employee in Dr. Joseph Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry, having escaped to America, revealed essential missing information that helps us piece together the story of Nazi-Soviet contacts under the surface of mutual recrimination. In an article in *The American Mercury* (February, 1940) she disclosed how Goebbels, with the connivance of high military and civilian Nazis, for years laid the groundwork for the Hitler-Stalin marriage of August 1939. On the basis of confidential reports from the German Embassy in Moscow she was aware that Marshal Tukhachevsky and other Muscovites were maintaining relations with Nazi officials with the explicit knowledge and consent of Stalin.

More familiar are the revelations made by Dr. Hermann Rauschning, at one time the Nazi President of the Danzig Senate and an intimate of the *Führer*. His

picture of Hitler's paranoiac ambitions seems incredible, until we realize that events have confirmed some of its seemingly more far-fetched passages. A Nazi alliance with Stalin was constantly in Hitler's mind and in his intimate conversation, according to Dr. Rauschning, even at the time when his anti-Soviet bluster sounded most realistic.

All of which may well provide the missing pieces in the jigsaw puzzle of the bewildering Moscow demonstration trials and executions without trial in 1935-38. Many of the "defendants" confessed to having carried on negotiations with Nazi leaders while their country was officially at sword's point with Hitler's government. We need only suppose that they were doing so as secret agents of Stalin, rather than as secret agents of Trotsky, and their strange stories are no longer strange. The substitution of Stalin's name for Trotsky's in that phase of the fantasy simplifies everything. It's like finding the key to a code. It would scarcely be the first time that a government tried out a sub-rosa diplomacy under the official policies. Nor would it be the first time that agents were conspicuously disowned when their secret mission seemed to have failed, especially if it enabled their regime to hit its dearest internal enemies in the process. The circumstance that the sub-rosa diplomacy ultimately succeeded only strengthens the hypothesis.

By way of an illustration, let us apply the hypothesis to the "confession" of one Sergei Bessonov, for some time councilor of the Soviet Embassy in Berlin. Apart from official instructions, he testified, he maintained a

special correspondence with Assistant Commissar of Foreign Affairs Krestinsky:

"And if in this correspondence Krestinsky were to say that his view on current questions of Soviet-German relations were such-and-such, and that he advised waiting for official instructions on this question, that would mean that I was to act in accordance with his 'personal' point of view, irrespective of what the official instructions might be."

Such diplomatic counterpoint would be entirely natural if Stalin were seeking an understanding with Hitler at the time. The clandestine contacts confessed to were chiefly with industrial and army leaders in the Third Reich—precisely the groups dissatisfied with Hitler's foreign policies who might logically co-operate to divert those policies back to the former channel of Soviet-German friendship. Interestingly, in this connection, Miss Knaust's article disclosed that one of the prime movers for the Soviet-Nazi rapprochement was General von Blomberg, head of the Reich Army at the time. Hitler's subsequent purge of his army ranks was curiously parallel, though on a much smaller scale, to Stalin's purge of the Red Army leaders.

The full inside story of the Soviet-German relations which reached their sensational climax in August 1939 will probably not be told for a great many years. What we know and can guess at represents only an unsatisfactory and tantalizing fraction of the whole. And yet, over and above the specific facts of the situation there were political tendencies which led better-informed ob-

servers to discount the Hitler-Nazi enmity and the temperature of the Kremlin's professions of love for democracy.

In October 1936, when the Popular Front craze was at its height, a former German communist, Willi Schlamm, wrote these words, in his book *Dictatorship of Lies*:

"The Third Reich is marching against Europe. When and as long as Stalin's Russia opposes its march, it will be attacked. When Stalin withdraws from France and the European democracies, he can count on Hitler's tolerance. The anti-Bolshevistic crusade of the Third Reich is designed to obtain not the Ukraine but parts of Western and Central Europe and colonies; it is designed to break not Stalin's regime, but the Franco-Russian military alliance. It won't take long and the Führers will conclude a realistic non-aggression pact. The one will guarantee Stalin's nationalistic state, the other will leave Europe to a Hitler-fate."

Thus, nearly three years before it happened, men aware of the realities behind the slogans were able to forecast accurately the Stalin-Hitler pacts which touched off the second World War.

## XXVI

# THE GREAT STALINIST HOAX

**S**TALIN DOES NOTHING BY HALVES. Having decided to throw over the mock-revolutionism of the Third Period, for the mock-democracy of the Fourth Period, he made a full 180-degree turn. Yesterday's "social Fascists" became today's beloved partners in a united front that compassed everyone and everything willing to be included—except of course, communists of other than the Stalinist persuasion. These latter were conveniently re-defined as Fascists.

Not only did Russia join the League of Robber Nations, but Maxim Litvinov made himself the foremost spokesman of democratic collective security. On May 2, 1935, the Soviet Ambassador and M. Laval signed in Paris the "mutual assistance" treaty of their two countries. The same month, while being munificently entertained in Moscow, M. Laval issued a statement, jointly with the Russians: "Monsieur Stalin understands and fully approves the measures of national defense taken by France to raise its armaments to the level of its security." In other words, the class war in France was off. Communists must collaborate with the government for military preparedness. A little later a Russian plenipotentiary to the Communist Youth of France instructed them: "If in

this period you make your revolution in France, you are traitors."

Meeting after a seven years' vacation, the Communist International late in 1935 put its official seal on the new democratic line. No longer must communists badger lesser Left breeds. Now they must work together with even the mildest of them. "Trojan horse" tactics must be used to enter and if possible obtain control of the steering wheels of existing labor, liberal, cultural, military organizations. Asked by an American editor, Roy W. Howard, whether Russia was really abandoning plans for world revolution, Stalin replied smilingly, "We never had such plans and intentions." The astonished Mr. Howard said that the world has thought differently. "This is the product of a misunderstanding," Stalin assured him. A tragic misunderstanding? "No, a comical one. Or, perhaps, tragi-comic," Stalin explained.

And thus, while Stalin's private emissaries wooed Hitler, Russia and its foreign extensions assumed the leading role in an anti-Fascist agitation that demanded nothing less than an immediate collective war of extermination against Germany, Italy and Japan. Previous strictures on democracy were forgotten and in all countries the local Communist Party draped itself in the national flag and called for a war to save democracy. In the United States, the communists presented themselves as the true successors of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, the true repositories of the faith of the Founding Fathers, heritors of the War of Independence. "Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism," the communist *Führer*, Earl Browder, declaimed. The

equivalent hocus-pocus was used in England, in France, everywhere.

It was the great Stalinist hoax, and was to remain unexposed for nearly four years, until Stalin had achieved his purpose by embracing Hitler. In many countries, particularly in France, the Trojan horsemen succeeded in bringing in full-fledged People's Front governments. In many countries, and particularly in the United States, the communists succeeded in "capturing" existing organizations, and in launching whole phalanxes of false-front committees, bureaus, leagues for a multitude of purposes. The meekest of the socialist groupings suddenly found themselves far to the Left of the renovated democratic communists, now concerned only with maintaining the capitalist *status quo* against the threat of Fascist barbarism.

Why Stalin decided on the hoax is easy to understand. Doubting the loyalty of the Red Army, he was mortally frightened of the Nazi threat. Volcanic discontents at the heart of the Russian population, the breakdown of the over-advertised Soviet industrialization, the sorry state of his transportation system—these and a thousand other factors made the need to head off the Hitlerite danger urgent: unless and until he could come to terms with that danger.

No, it is not difficult to understand why Stalin launched the democratic hoax. The difficulty is in understanding why millions outside fell for it. At home Russia was with every month more centralized, more totalitarian, its prisons and prison camps more crowded. The Stalinist pattern of life in his own country came continually closer



to the Fascist pattern. Yet hordes of wishful thinking middle-class people in all democratic nations accepted communist professions of democracy at face value. Even in the midst of the great carnage, these hordes for the most part continued to draw their spiritual sustenance from the bowels of Stalin's Trojan horses.

The Spanish civil war broke out in July 1936. Stalin's Spanish policies were so flagrantly anti-democratic that the purblind might have been expected to open their eyes. But amazingly, the hoax was buttressed rather than exposed. Such is the will to believe! When the two Fascist dictatorships had already intervened, the Kremlin joined and for a time observed the non-intervention agreement. Stalin was using the situation to demonstrate to France and England the sincerity of his anti-revolutionary attitudes. Only when a Franco victory threatened to strengthen the Fascist bloc did Russia intervene—and then on terms that guaranteed to the Western democracies that the Loyalist regime would be kept within polite bourgeois bounds.

Along with Soviet intervention in Spain came all the paraphernalia of Stalin's domestic machinery of terror. The price it demanded was the dictatorship of the communists—not for proletarian revolution, this being the Fourth Period, but to head off that dire possibility. "Defense of Republican order in the respect of property," was the aim propounded by the Spanish Communist Party. The anarcho-syndicalists, Left Communists, other groups thinking in terms of social revolution—convinced that only the impetus of a social revolution could rally the masses and challenge the superior Franco strength

—were liquidated in proper G.P.U. fashion. Loyalist leaders unwilling to take Stalinist orders were removed, some of them murdered. A Cheka terror gained sway which wiped out the essential difference between the two sides of the war for the simple Spaniards. Stalin's intervention proved a kiss of death for the Loyalist cause. It won neither the assistance of the *status quo* governments outside, nor the intervention of world revolutionary opinion. It won chiefly applause from muddled fellow-travelers and from fervent anti-Fascists without the good sense to recognize Fascism under non-Fascist labels.

The legend has been assiduously spread that Russia was prepared to throw itself into the breach when Hitler threatened Czechoslovakia. The surface evidence, however, is that Kremlin diplomacy did not exert itself unduly to reassure Prague or to scare Berlin. Foreign Commissar Litvinov limited himself to brief, restrained and icily formal statements about Russia's readiness to abide by the strict letter of its undertakings: namely, to enter the fray only if France went in first. The tone of an official communiqué tells more than its substance, and there was nothing in the tone of these too correct statements to hearten the Czechs or dishearten the Nazis. Mr. Litvinov's only really violent denunciation of Franco-British tactics came in his Geneva speech, *after* Chamberlain had struck his bargain with Hitler. The same speech a few days earlier might conceivably have helped to save Czechoslovakia; as it was, it only saved Stalin's face, which was its manifest purpose.

Russia did not mobilize its armed forces demonstratively, as it might have done and as others were doing.

War Commissar Voroshilov did not even bother to return from his visit to the Siberian Far East. More significant still, the Kremlin took no steps to mobilize public opinion for the eventuality of a war. Had Stalin expected to fight, or even believed in the marginal possibility of a fight, he would have prepared his population for it. But while the rest of the world seethed with excitement, the Russian press remained curiously calm and aloof—foreign correspondents in Moscow commented on this curiosity at the time. Even the formal commitments by Litvinov, for the record, were soft-pedaled in the Russian newspapers. Moscow's great show of anger and combative spirit came after the thing was all settled in Munich, when it amounted to so much empty gesturing. Not entirely empty. It is important to recall that this anger was directed more against the democracies who had sold out the Czechs than against Hitler for his aggressions.

A second occasion for self-righteous indignation presented itself during the anti-Jewish riots in Germany early in November 1938. Again Russia remained self-consciously silent. A few editorials did protest mildly, as though to keep the record straight; and belatedly—two weeks after the event—a number of indignation meetings were called in Russian cities. But no such groundswell of anti-Nazi feeling as inundated the rest of the world was permitted to develop in the Soviet land. No official objections to the outrages were voiced, no Soviet diplomats were recalled, no Soviet offers of hospitality to the victims were forthcoming. In short, in 1938, as in the first year of Hitler's victory, nothing was done to block the road to a rapprochement. A few months later the

official who had come to symbolize the democratic collective-security line in Soviet foreign affairs, Litvinov, was dismissed.

While Soviet doors remained carefully bolted against refugees from Fascist terror, while the purges proceeded lustily throughout the Soviet Union, while a totalitarian savior was strangling the Loyalist resistance, the Stalinist hoax prospered and grew fat. Leagues "against war and Fascism," "for peace and democracy" rolled up millionfold memberships. Champagne and caviar displaced the hammer and sickle as symbols of a bogus revolution. Millionaires' sons and preachers of Christian justice hailed the glorious victories of Stalin in exterminating the associates of Lenin. In cultural centers like Paris, London and New York the cynical Trojan horsemen and their innocent fellow-travelers captured strategic positions in the fields of journalism, literature, theater, cinema, education, religion.

In some quarters they succeeded in establishing a virtual intellectual Red Terror. Those who saw through the hoax, or merely hesitated to glorify Stalin's blood-letting in Russia or terror in Spain, were tarred and feathered in print and sent into the wilderness of Fascist barbarians. Most reprehensible of all in the eyes of the communists and their innocents, understandably, were those who ventured to expose the hoax—and among them, particularly, the few who emphasized the inner moral identity of the Red and Brown dictatorships and therefore warned of the likelihood that Hitler and Stalin would make peace at the expense of the democratic world.

And then the hoax exploded. In August of 1939 Stalin made a bonfire of the Trojan horses. Swastikas fluttered by the side of the hammer and sickle. While French and British military missions were still in Moscow, dumfounded and humiliated, Hitler's Foreign Minister, ~~Joachim von~~ Ribbentrop, flew into Moscow and in the presence of Stalin signed a "non-aggression pact." The rest of the tragic comedy is too fresh to need more than summarizing. A few hours after Stalin's "parliament" obediently and with its as yet unbroken unanimity confirmed the pact, Nazi Germany launched its lightning war against Poland.

Seventeen days later Stalin sent the Red Army into stricken Poland, while Warsaw was still defending itself hopelessly and before the last of the Polish Ministers had fled the country. At that moment Stalin still had seven separate agreements of friendship and non-aggression with the nation whose territory he violated—they are still unrescinded at this writing. The Polish Ambassador in Moscow was still being treated as a friendly diplomat from a friendly nation. A few weeks later the Polish carcass was divided between the two dictators amidst ceremonies of mutual love.

The Anglo-French Allies, in conformity with their guarantee of the Western frontiers of Poland, declared war on Germany. Russia, though it helped in the "kill," and shared the booty, remained technically neutral and the Allies, naturally, were content to recognize the thin pretense of neutrality. Taking advantage of the wave of fear, Stalin summoned the heads of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian governments to the Kremlin, in

precisely the style established by Hitler when he summoned appointed victims to Berchtesgaden. Under threat of military action these statesmen signed away chunks of their sovereignty, granting Stalin naval bases on the Baltic and other privileges on their territory.

His attempt to apply the same pressures on Finland failed. Whereupon, in the last days of November, Stalin pushed through a typical Hitlerite farce as preparation for an invasion, except that the Russian version was more crude and if possible more transparent. A campaign of vituperation was opened up against Finland and its government. The little country of 4,000,000 was accused of planning aggressions against its neighbor of 180,000,000. Finally an impossible charge that Finland had actually "invaded" Russia was made, and without permitting opportunity for investigation, a Russian variant of the *Blitzkrieg* was launched against Finland on the last day of November. A few days later a puppet "people's government" of Finland, with one of the Communist International wheelhorses, Otto Kuusinen, as "Premier," was set up solemnly in the insignificant village of Terijoki, not far from Leningrad, under the protection of Red bayonets. The formation of the new government was broadcast to Finland from Terijoki, where there is no radio station, via Leningrad. The "Premier" invited Russia to "liberate" his country and entered into non-aggression and other treaties with Moscow.

The *Blitzkrieg* miscarried. The public opinion of the entire world was aroused against Stalin's act of aggression. The bombing of Helsingfors and other open cities deepened the world-wide revulsion. Even Italy, forget-

ting its own holidays in Ethiopia and Albania, waxed indignant. The lightning attack quickly debauched into an old-style Czarist war of mass attack regardless of cost in man-power. An initial advance in the Arctic reaches of Finland, beyond Petsamo, was repulsed thereafter. Finnish forces halted the Red troops at the Mannerheim Line on the Karelian Isthmus. Several thrusts from the eastern frontier, in an attempt to bisect Finland, failed. At the end of ten weeks of warfare, at a cost of tens of thousands of casualties, Soviet forces held less than four thousand square miles of Finnish soil. The League of Nations had expelled Russia from membership and called on all countries to give all possible assistance to the victim of Stalin's aggression. The Allies rushed shipment of planes and munitions across the Scandinavian peninsulas in the face of Soviet and German warnings and protests.

What the August pacts did to puncture Stalin's democratic hoax, the invasion of Poland and the attack on Finland finished. The fellow-traveling gentry got off, for the most part, without waiting for the next station. With the exception of a handful with whom Stalinism had taken incurable pathological forms, and a few others of exceptionally low I.Q.'s whose minds could not catch up with events, those that remained on board were the subsidized agents of Stalin. Their pathetic explanations, contradictory at first, finally shook down to a fixed pattern of absurdity. In the design, however, are a few elements of reality which deserve comment.

The Allies had driven Stalin into Hitler's arms by

their policies of appeasement, the subsidized apologists explained. England and France are merely imperialist governments, so why should Stalin distinguish between Nazi and non-Nazi brands of imperialism? The charlatan-ism of the explanation is on the surface. Granted that France and England are imperialistic, surely they were no more so in August 1939, when they were ready to enter into an agreement with Stalin, than in the preceding four years, when Stalin was ready to enter into an agreement with them. On the day after signing the Ribbentrop pact, the Moscow *Pravda* told its readers that Russia had done this "because the governments of England and France demonstrated during the military negotiations in Moscow that they were not really prepared to fight." For years communists had demanded that the democracies *fight* against Germany. To call them imperialists because finally they did decide to fight scarcely squares with all that went before.

And if Moscow resented the appeasement policies of the Western nations, why did it pick the moment when the appeasement policies were *ended*, when the Allies had finally decided to accept the collective security thesis, to renounce that thesis? Why, when the war on Fascism was actually under way, did Stalin and his foreign megaphones vociferously *demand* a peace of appeasement, on Hitler's terms?

The apologists also denied the existence of any specific or general understandings between the two dictatorships beyond the published pacts. Stalin, indeed, walked into Eastern Poland to "save" a portion of the country from Hitler. Let us see. The Ribbentrop pact provided for



constant consultation between the two countries on "questions of common interest." Surely nothing of greater "common interest" can be imagined than the territories lying between them: Poland and the Baltic countries. In his Reichstag speech of October 6, Hitler stated that the Polish events had been agreed upon in advance by the two nations and Stalin's press published his words without denial. Forty-eight hours before Hitler attacked Poland, his official press service had announced that "The consultation provided between Moscow and Berlin already became effective, mainly concerning the German Polish problem. Germany and Russia are determined to accept all consequences resulting from their agreement."

Obviously there can be no "proof" of secret commitments and understandings between the two totalitarian partners until one of them is ready to make them public. Moreover, understandings whether secret or open are liable to violation. It is not beyond possibility that Stalin may double-cross Hitler at some point, particularly if an Allied victory seems inevitable. There is even more chance that Hitler may double-cross Stalin. If and when he is caught in a blind alley, and faces the certainty of defeat, it is conceivable that he may attempt to save himself or to obtain better peace terms at Stalin's expense. The threat of opening the dikes against Bolshevism, allowing Stalin's hordes to overrun Germany and then Europe, lost some of its sting when Russia demonstrated its military deficiencies in the Finnish campaign. But it is still a potent threat and one likely to appeal to the more blindly reactionary groups in the West. But these theoretical possibilities do not alter the fact that

the Soviet-Nazi rapprochement was made in earnest and for long, whatever its ultimate fate.

The theory that the Allies had sought to "sic" Germany on Russia does not hold up under examination. True, certain elements in England and France were content to see a strong Germany as a counterweight against Russia. But above all they were interested in maintaining the European equilibrium. They wanted to avoid excessive rocking of the European boat, for fear of what war might bring in its train, whether their own countries won or lost. Had the Allies wanted to direct Hitler's aggressive energies against Russia, they would have encouraged him to move against Poland and Rumania—those being the roads, the only passable roads, toward Russia. Instead they guaranteed the inviolability of the Polish and Rumanian western borders! A strange way, surely, to let Hitler loose against Stalin!

Early in November the Kremlin formulated its new "party line," the line of the Fifth Period. It was sketched in Moscow editorials, sharpened in a speech by Premier Molotov, and finally announced by George Dimitrov for the Communist International. The democratic slogans, of course, were cast aside. With them went the "anti-Fascist" slogans. True, Germany and Italy were attacked—but in the same category with all other "imperialist" and "capitalist" countries. The significant point is that the previous distinction between Fascist and non-Fascist nations was obliterated.

The new slogans returned, verbally at least, to the "revolutionary" Third Period. Capitalist nations must

be upset immediately and the oppressed colonial peoples must be aroused to throw off their yoke. In short, "anti-imperialist" takes the place of "anti-Fascist" as the rallying cry. The one "revolutionary" slogan not revived—and surely it is no oversight—is the former call upon the masses to transform imperialist wars into civil wars. That might not work out so well if it penetrated into Germany. Besides, a genuine revolutionary impulse might not easily be confined to specified borders but might penetrate into Russia itself.

What is the essential meaning of the new line in relation to the realities of the new war? The anti-capitalist verbiage has little or no meaning in Germany, where the Nazi regime, likewise, continually berates the capitalists and plutocrats and talks of the "socialist millennium." If the verbiage will have any repercussions it will be only in genuinely capitalist nations, and particularly in those where the strain is greatest due to war. More to the point is the anti-imperialist propaganda. Germany, through no choice of her own, has no colonies. Translated into geographical terms the propaganda affects primarily the British and French and Dutch empires—India, Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, Morocco, Indo-China, the East Indies.

The entire effect of the new party line is thus to stir up trouble for the Allies on their home fronts and in their colonial back-yards. Whatever Stalin may ultimately do for Hitler in military or economic ways, he threw the entire weight of his magnificent world-wide propaganda and agitation machine behind Hitler—more specifically, against the Allies—from the very start. Nothing Hitler

"gave" Stalin in the early months in Poland or the Baltic begins to pay for this crucial assistance the Kremlin gave him in return. In every country and colony on the face of the globe, a large or small apparatus exists, responsive to Stalin's slightest touch. It agitated defeatist sentiment behind the lines in France and England. It backed the Hitler peace offensive of October and November. In the United States it did its tiny best to block the lifting of the embargo and continued to agitate against any measure calculated to give material or moral aid to the democracies.

Until it again changes without notice, the new Kremlin line is not a Stalin line, but a Hitler-Stalin line.

The Soviet military debacle in Finland in the first months of that war may prove to be Stalin's fatal mistake. Military experts had questioned the "invincible might" of the huge Russian army and air corps. Many journalists who have made Russia their principal object of study believed that Stalin's military weakness, his eagerness to avoid war, was the principal ingredient in his foreign policies. They argued that Hitler's willingness to let Stalin advance into Europe rested on the Germans' superior knowledge of the truth about Stalin's fighting forces; that the Nazis simply were not afraid of him and therefore could see him expand without undue misgivings. Nevertheless, the mystery of Stalin's military strength remained, and it was too risky a mystery to probe.

The Finnish adventure forced the probe. Clearly the "invincible might" was overestimated by the Kremlin it-

self. The experts who depreciated Russia's strength apparently had given Stalin too much benefit of the doubt. Certainly Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania would have put up more resistance if their turn had come *after* Finland's. The courage of other potential victims, in the Balkans, the Near East and Middle Asia, was fortified by the first stages of the Finnish war. In the Far East, too, Stalin's blunder in providing a test of his arms must have its effects. The Japanese groups opposed to rapprochement with Russia were instantly strengthened; Chiang Kai-shek's bargaining power in his continuous struggle against Soviet demands was raised.

This volume, put on the press in the very midst of these great events, makes no prophecies. Deficient as the Red Army may be, its strength may suffice to conquer a nation one-fiftieth of Russia's weight. The chance of the Finnish war merging into the larger European war, with Finland, Sweden and Norway as battleground, seems real at this writing. Either of the totalitarian partners, or both, may seek to save themselves at the other's expense sooner than now seems likely. Stalin, having achieved power at home far beyond his own wildest imagining, may have overreached himself in the effort to translate that power into empire abroad.

## XXVII

### TRIUMPH OF MEDIOCRITY

ON STALIN'S SIXTIETH BIRTHDAY, December 21, 1939, Soviet aviators hurled bombs at hospitals and working class homes in Helsingfors. It was their birthday present to the "leader of the world proletariat," the "greatest representative of creative Marxism," the "great machinist of locomotive history," the "Lenin today." These are typical titles bestowed on the *Vozhd*, The Leader, by officials who owed their jobs and their lease on life to Stalin. The Soviet masses were apprised that the downtrodden of the whole world, including "metal workers in Detroit," blessed the name of "our own Stalin." They were not apprised of the bombs over Helsingfors. In fact, the Finnish and European wars and all other news were compressed into a single column in the Moscow *Pravda*. The remaining seventy-one columns were devoted to Stalin, thus establishing a "world's record for newsless newspapers," as the New York *Times* correspondent chronicled.

The occasion marked a full found decade of absolute power and called for a demonstration more abjectly fawning than the one staged for the unofficial "crowning" on his fiftieth birthday. The encomiasts did their best to go lower than the nadir. Unhappily some of the most capable flatterers of 1929 had been shot by Stalin in the interim. The civil war heroes, who had discovered belatedly that

Stalin had led them, were no longer among the living. Neither were the Old Bolsheviks who had recollected, again belatedly, that Djughashvilli-Koba had always been Lenin's *alter ego*. But the few old-timers who remained—Molotov, Kalinin, Voroshilov—did their cringing best, and the new generation of time-servers provided quantity if not quality.

With his natural instinct for ritual and catechism, Stalin dug up his comment of ten years before and recited it once more as his response to the adulation:

"Your congratulations and greetings I credit to the account of the great party of the working class which gave me birth and raised me in its own image. You must not doubt, comrades, that I am ready in the future, as in the past, to give to the task of the working class, to the task of proletarian revolution and world communism, all my strength, all my abilities, and if necessary all my blood, drop by drop."

Since he had first made this promise he had shed a lot of blood, though not a drop of his own. Humanity has cause to fear men too ready to give their lives for a cause. Such men begin by taking the lives of others; the theoretical willingness to die is the most satisfactory equipment for the practical business of killing. The balance-sheet of Stalin's decade of absolutism, which no one in his own realm dared to draw up, would have included the millions who died in the man-made famine, the five million or more uprooted from their native villages in the "liquidation of kulaks," the myriad victims of the series of purges. It would have included, too, the wars in the seventy-second column of *Pravda*, since one of them had been launched

by the Stalin-Hitler pact and the other, in Finland, was exclusively the handiwork of the "great machinist of locomotive history."

Had the birthday come six months earlier, it would have been celebrated by millions in all countries now abstaining from the festivities. These were the dupes of the Fourth Period hoax. They now felt themselves betrayed and insulted, their eager emotional investment in Soviet-led democracy turned into an obscene joke. They were the shocked and tongue-tied victims of a gigantic practical joke. Stalin had used them, and thrown them away without so much as an apology. He had no qualms on the subject: that was merely Stalin's way. Having aroused a large portion of mankind against Hitler's Germany, he left these anti-Fascist enthusiasts in the lurch by joining Hitler. Pictures of the scene when von Ribbentrop and Molotov signed the pact in the Kremlin show Stalin grinning. He was not unaware of the macabre joke. He had demoralized Zinoviev and Kamenev to destroy Trotsky; then he demoralized Rykov and Bukharin to destroy Zinoviev and Kamenev. Even thus he had demoralized the anti-Fascists of the world by using them to win over Hitler.

There is greatness of a sort in this ability to use individuals and masses and movements. Duplicity on the majestic scale cannot be denied to Stalin. The talents of an unscrupulous machine politician are magnified in him on a scale that puts him in a class by himself in the contemporary world. He knows better than any Boss Tweed the value of established political slogans and symbols. Not the least of his achievements has been his capacity to fill old "revolutionary" packages with his own brand of to-



talitarian goods. Even his expedition against Finland—in direct succession, if cruder in execution, to Manchuria, Ethiopia, Czechoslovakia—is decked in the colors of “international revolution.” His invasion of Poland, of course, “extended the area of triumphant socialism.”

Beneath the labels is the time-honored, low-down game of power politics. The pretensions of a crusading revolutionary purpose conceal ordinary Russian imperialist urges, Pan-Slavic appetites, traditional Russian ambitions for “windows on Europe” and warm water outlets on the larger seas. In the unfolding Stalinist imperialism—unless it is checked by competing imperialisms—“communism” will play the same role as “civilization” and “Christianity” served in their day in expanding existing empires.

A significant difference between Stalin and his fellow dictators, Hitler and Mussolini, is often overlooked. The *Duce* and the *Führer* possess the equipment of dynamic leadership. Both of them are spellbinders, rabble-rousers, supreme exhibitionists. They see everything, are seen by everybody and manage to be everywhere at the same time. The abilities of the *Vozhd* are not merely more meager in these respects—they are of a totally different order.

Stalin is not an orator, as we have noted. I have heard his slow, labored, uninspired speech, in Russian strongly tintured with his native Caucasian accent. He has neither the personal magnetism nor the epileptic zeal of his Teuton and Latin colleagues. He is essentially an *office dictator* who functions best in seclusion from his subjects, far-off and inaccessible in the grim shelter of his Kremlin hide-out. Only once in his career as a dictator has he spoken on

the radio. When he speaks at all, which is rarely, he chooses hand-picked audiences of specialists or party and government functionaries.

I have watched the other two dictators in action. They are shrill, pyrotechnic, full of hysterical gestures. Stalin, as I noted in my interview with him, speaks slowly, moves deliberately, with an almost complete absence of gesture. There is about the man something deeply Oriental—infinately cautious, brooding, inward. On the surface he seems relaxed, but within he is tensed to spring. He gives a feeling of boundless energy and emotion held in leash by an iron will.

Stalin's cruelty is not angry and impulsive, like Hitler's or Mussolini's, but far more terrible: quiet, patient, carefully planned. And his policies, too, for the most part have the same character. Indeed, the merging of his destiny, for the time being, with Hitler's illustrates this. To the world it seemed sudden. Actually it was the product of long scheming, superhuman persistence on Stalin's part. In judging his every move on the larger world stage where he had injected himself so ponderously, this capacity for deliberate, long-term connivance must not be left out of the reckoning. Psychologically it gives him a certain advantage over the more theatrical and impetuous dictators with whom he deals.

The population of the Soviet capital is vouchsafed a flitting glimpse of their dictator at rare intervals, as it rolls in massed formation under clouds of banners across Red Square, cheering hoarsely. On these grand parade occasions Stalin looks down from the parapet of Lenin's granite tomb, bored and candidly contemptuous of the

crowds. But there is also an edge of embarrassment in the wave of his hand in response to the cheers. He is not at home with crowds. That ability to flatter the rabble which is second nature to the other dictators is totally absent in Stalin. He knows that his authority does not depend on the masses, but on his tight grip on and shrewd manipulation of the political strings clutched in his fists. He did not climb to power on the shoulders of the mob, but through the labyrinthine corridors of inner party politics.

Stalin is a recluse and an introvert—a man living inside his own shell. He has no friends, but only underlings; no political allies, but only flatterers. All those who have been close to him and dared to speak afterwards have remarked on the symptoms of his profound feelings of inferiority. His ambitions and cruelties, his pathological craving for vengeance are aspects of these feelings. He is too intelligent not to savor the spuriousness of the adulation, not to despise the adulators. Yet he craves more and still more of the counterfeit salve. The sense of inadequateness that has obsessed him from childhood cannot be exorcised by success alone. He must have tangible proofs of greatness and dominion—in more obsequious praise, more executions, more conquests at home and abroad.

On the mental level his inferiorities are most sensitive. He is impelled to make friends with men of culture and patronize the arts. He was proud of the subservient friendship of Maxim Gorki and found opportunities to show himself publicly in the novelist's presence. He was always accessible to Constantine Stanislavsky, founder of the Moscow Art Theater. But this excessive kindness to a few, a symbolic comradeship with genius, does not interfere

with his harshness to intellectuals. For periods, as we have seen, the educated classes were the special target of his organized brutality. The concentration camps are still filled with scientists, historians, writers. A list of those whom he has liquidated in these categories would sound like a roster of present-day Russian genius.

Physically, he has filled out with the years. The sallow, sharp-featured Djugashvilli has been covered up by the heavy-jowled, fatty features now familiar to the entire world. His flat visored military hat, his greatcoat and rough boots are imitated by those who toady to him. It seems almost a uniform of leadership. The "intellectual" beard is out of fashion in the Soviet bureaucracy; only the "rustic" Kalinin among the mighty of the land still wears one. But the shaggy Stalin mustache is universally imitated. An element of comedy is sometimes provided by this toadying. When Lazar Kaganovich first emerged in Moscow affairs he wore a beard like Lenin's. When he began to rise among Stalin's favorites, he suddenly appeared minus the beard but with a mustache duplicating Stalin's.

Despite the natural curiosity that attaches to the dictator's private existence, it is really of no importance. Stalin belongs so completely to his career that the two cannot be separated. Caucasians are by reputation lusty lovers of wine, women and song. Stalin's larger obsessions have superseded these minor indulgences. It is as though his hunger for power had swallowed up all lesser appetites of the senses. He craves power not for what it can give in luxury and physical satisfaction but only as a basis for more power, like those nerve-sick misers who gather money for its own sake. He has not changed his own simple way

of life as his power expanded. The knowledge that his slightest wish is law, that 180,000,000 people depend on his mood and tremble at his command are apparently the satisfactions on which his spirit thrives.

At home, Stalin's power seems secure. The discontents are vast, but inchoate, without focal strengths. Unless his regime is shaken disastrously by some external catastrophe, it seems safe. Russians are infinitely meek and long-suffering. It was their lack of revolutionary spirit, in a sense, which made the Bolshevik revolution possible; it enabled a minority to impose itself on a teeming population. Relatively fresh from serfdom, the great mass of people accept obedience as their eternal lot. But is an obedience without loyalty to the masters, always ready to explode in rebellion when the hand that holds the whip falters. It takes losing wars—as in 1905 and 1917—to shake the people out of their lethargy.

Only another war, and a catastrophically losing one, could effectively challenge Stalin's ascendancy. Knowing this, the avoidance of war has been the keystone of his policies. The aberration of the Finnish aggression betrays an under-estimation of the task, rather than a rejection of that keystone. Captured Soviet prisoners in Finland told interviewers they had been assured that the whole campaign was a matter of six days. Soviet officials were quoted as believing that the invading Red troops would take Helsingfors in a few days, a week or two at most. Probably the attack represented less a change of policy than a mistake in military arithmetic.

In his Russia-outside-Russia, his political empire of the

Communist International, Stalin seems no less secure. The leadership of the International no longer has even the illusion of independence or participation in decisions. In the great turn represented by the Stalin-Hitler pact, for instance, affecting the International to its innermost marrow, the Kremlin did not so much as bother to tip off the ostensible leaders of the local Communist Parties about what was coming. It ignored them with calculated contempt. All those foreign leaders who had a vestige of individual spirit left in their make-up were eliminated in the long array of purges since 1926 or 1927. Those who survived the purge of Trotskyites, of Rights, and of the most recent assortment of dissenters, are of necessity men and women without private opinions—simply tools in the grip of the Kremlin autocracy.

The rank-and-file communists abroad, the simple ones, have been repeatedly tested. Having swallowed the man-made famine, the horrors of kulak liquidation, the recent trials and mass killings, they may be expected to swallow anything. Profound ignorance and profounder faith explain them; at least those who have remained from the beginning, since the turnover of membership in all Communist Parties is extremely large. In the American Party, one of its former leaders has told me, less than 3 per cent of the members have been in the fold since the first period of the party's life.

And thus Stalin stands today astride the world. The ugly duckling of Gori, the sulking professional revolutionist of Tiflis and Baku, the shadowy figure among the giants of the overturn of 1917, has achieved the pinnacle. No mat-

ter what the future may hold for him, his place in world history is already assured. Forever after he must be reckoned among the handful of men who have imposed themselves on their time, indelibly. Stalin's record in that history is written in blood. The cost of his achievement of personal power exceeds anything paid by the human race to other conquerors.

Whatever there was of hope in the Russian Revolution, Stalin has extinguished. Whatever there was in it of moral grandeur, Stalin has leveled with the mire. From the cobbler's hut in Georgia to the Kremlin and a new absolutism at a critical juncture in world affairs—such is the fabulous story of Yossif Vissarionovich Djugashvilli. There are other such stories in modern history. They represent the triumph of genius. In Stalin's case—and that is its unique quality—it represents the triumph of mediocrity.











